the PARIS REVIEW

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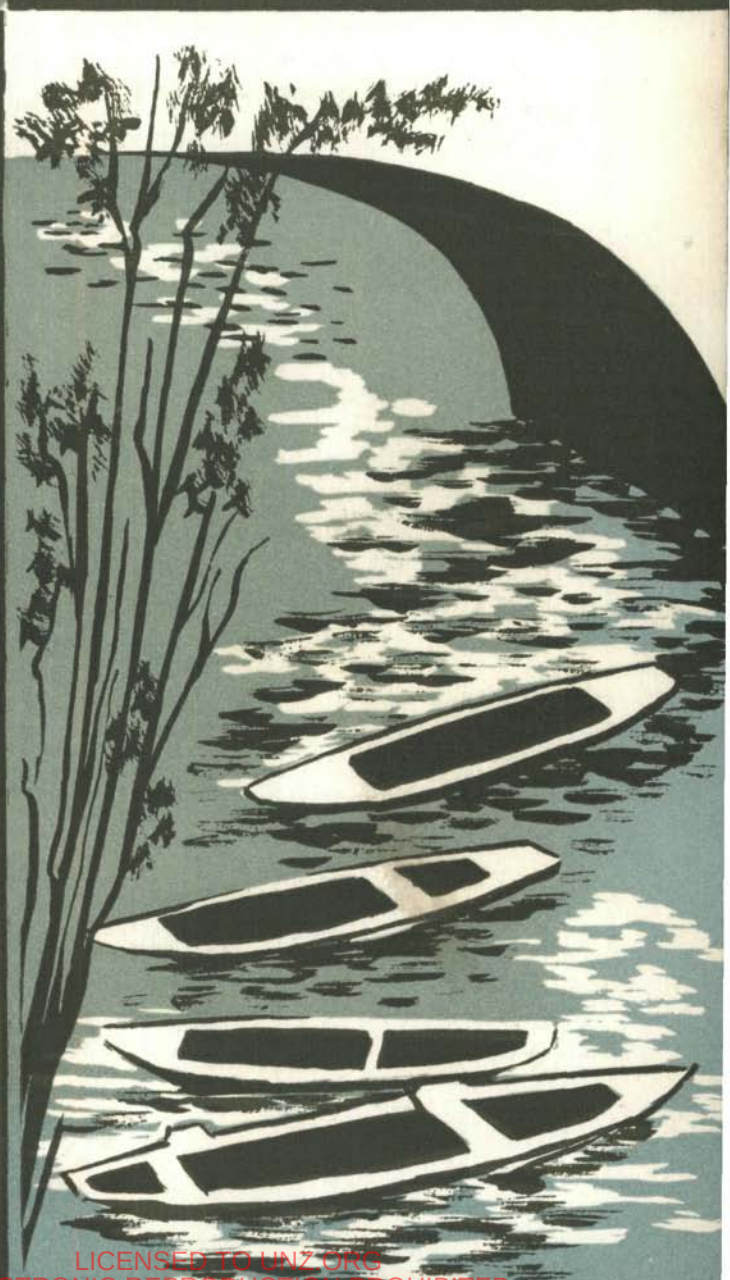

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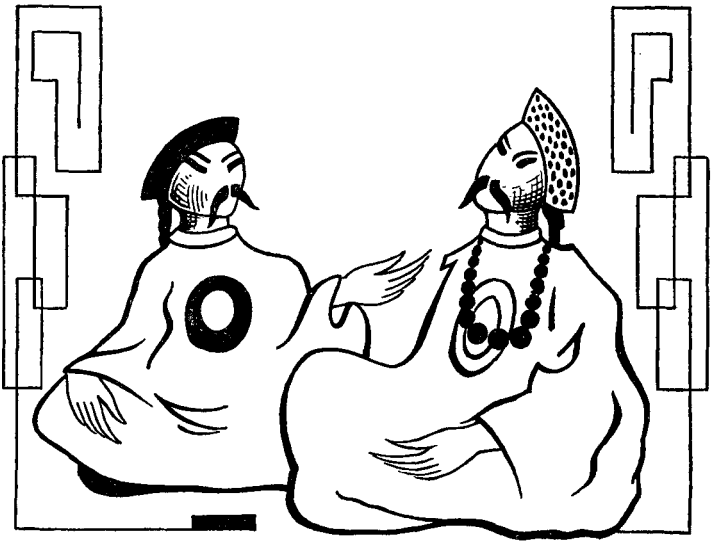

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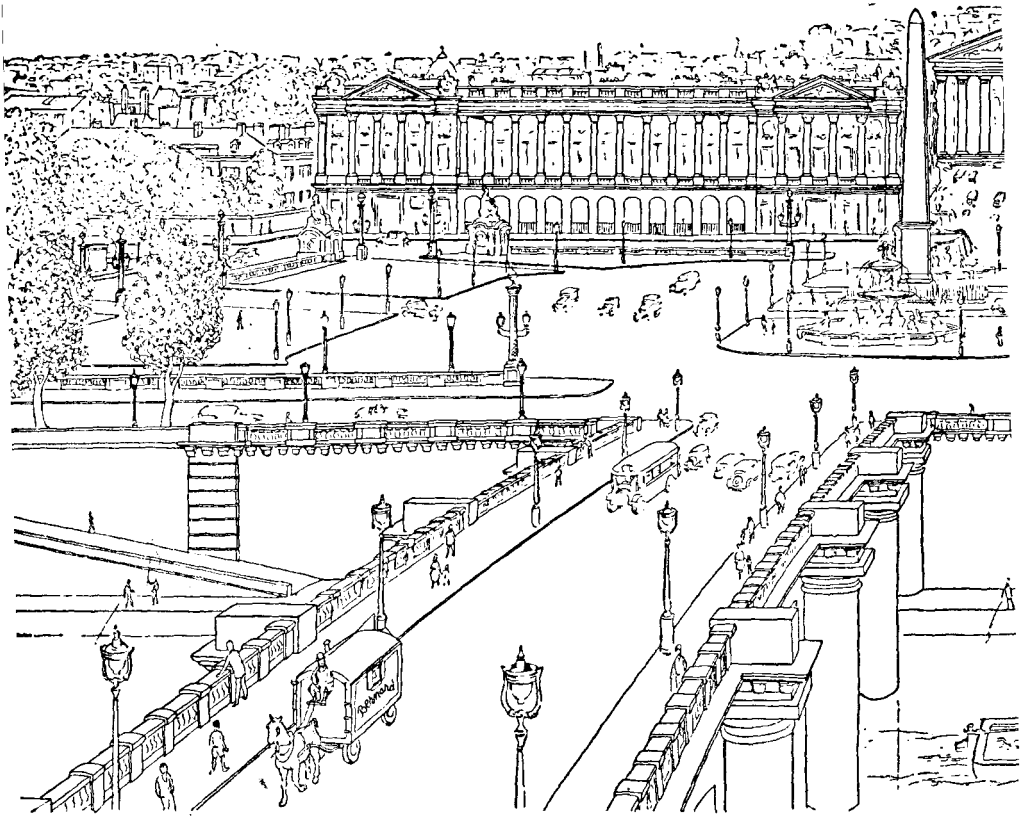

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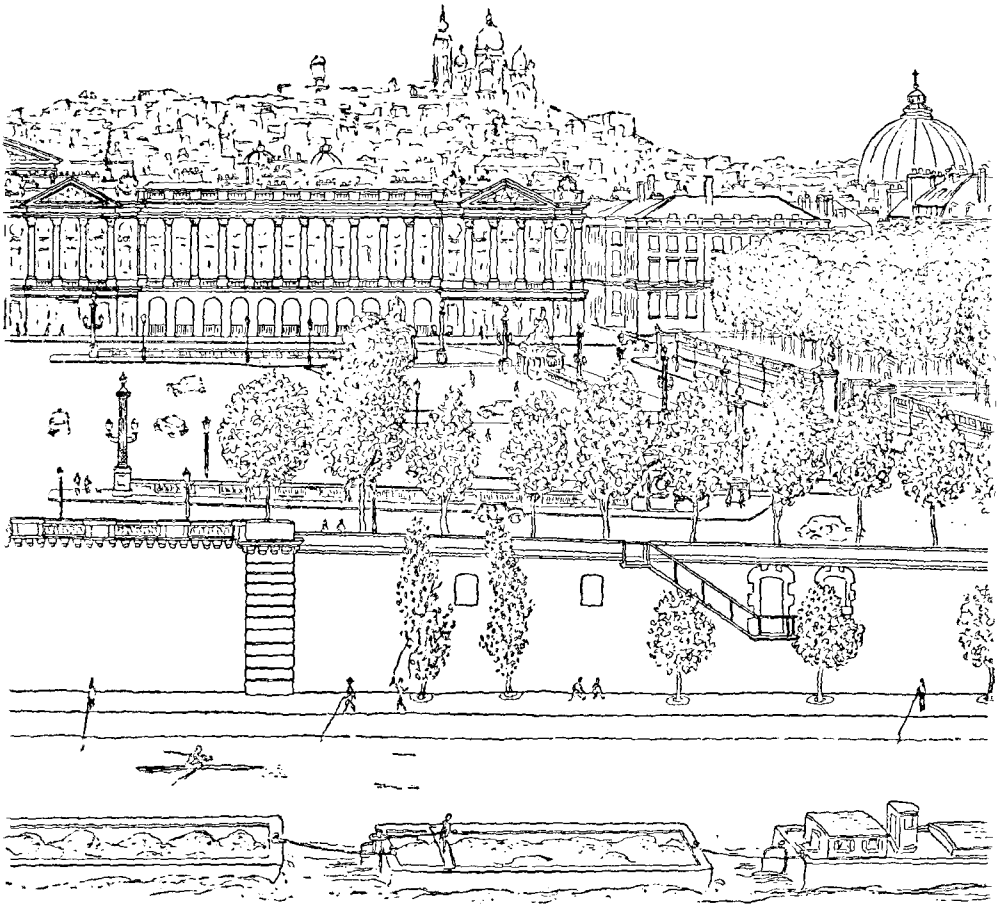

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(Cover by B. Whistler Dabney, Frontispiece by William Pène du Bois.

ERRATUM: Ralph Ellison in the interview on the Art of Fiction published in the last issue was misquoted in two sentences. "Most of the social realists of the period were concerned more with tragedy than with injustice. I wasn't, and am not, concerned with injustice, but with art," should have read, "Most of the social realists of the period were concerned *less* with tragedy than with injustice. I wasn't, and am not, *primarily* concerned with injustice, but with art."

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A SUMMER FOR THE DEAD

1

PEOPLE all through the San Gabriel Valley will remember the summer of 1950: heat, smog and humidity made a hell of all these California cities and many deaths were imputed to it. Those who did not have to remain in the streets took cover behind drawn window shades and fanned themselves with palmetto leaves or old newspapers, their free hands rubbing their smog-burnt eyes; and any bird that had strength enough in him picked up his wings and flew away. After the first day or two an empty stillness settled in and you missed the usual, the expected, the livingness of the world: the haggling of policemen with motorists, noisy games of children, strolling old ladies in pink lace hats, the flights of all those deserting birds. The world had been taken over by a race of strange somnambulists to whom you seldom bothered to nod or even say hello.

Such an extreme in the weather brought complaints from nearly everyone. But there was one young man who believed, at the beginning of the crisis, that this might turn out to be the favorite summer of his life. He lived alone on the top floor of an old rooming house behind the Pasadena Civic Auditorium. Pasadena had been his home for several years and though he had always been fond of it, its clean shaded streets and the rose gardens everywhere, white buildings and the church-like quiet of the nights, he now found it ideal.

Among the people who knew him, or rather, who were

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acquainted with him—for no one claimed to *know* Wesley Stuart—there existed various theories to explain his strangeness. Some guessed he was an artist or a poet who had not yet discovered his powers and that his silences were impregnated with lofty thoughts; while at least one person, his landlady, believed he suffered from some terrible spiritual hunger for which she knew a cure; and there were persons less sympathetic to oddness in others and they considered him either stupid or conceited or believed his remoteness to be an affectation.

Late one afternoon his landlady, Mrs. Kromer, a raw-boned giant of a woman, was seated spread-legged behind a broad bamboo screen on her front porch. Her flowered cotton housedress clung damp to her; and her feet, long ones with red-knuckled toes, were bare. A pretty young girl sat next to her in a green silk kimono that was torn under one arm. Her name was Faye Zelger.

Wesley had just returned from work and as he walked up the porch steps, Faye and Mrs. Kromer were squeezing lemon juice into their mouths. The old woman's face was so large that any movement in it would attract attention anywhere; the jaw is like a great sac of skin stuffed with a thick round cowbone, a lantern jaw, and whenever she sucks her teeth in church children often crane their necks to watch.—Now Wesley paused for a moment to watch her attack on the lemon.

"Somebody claims it's a help," Mrs. Kromer said. "Got another'n if you wanta try it."

The girl winked at Wesley as if inviting him to humor the old woman. "Go ahead, Wes. Get yourself a lemon." Faye had been brought up in Florida and she spoke with a broad Southern accent. "They work real charms, lemons."

"No thanks, I feel fine. I like it hot."

Faye smiled as she searched about in her mind for an answer. But Wesley did not wait for it. When he had gone inside Faye raised her eyebrows superciliously and turned to Mrs. Kromer. "Loves it," she said. "Thinks it's just glorious. I suppose if we all drop dead, he'll—think that's

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just glorious, too." She looked at the lemon and shuddered with disgust. "Mr. Tin God. Lord he gives me a stiff pain right where I sit."

"That's puttin it plain enough," Mrs. Kromer said.

"I'm sorry but I can't stand people that work s'hard to be different'n everybody else."

"You worked up a pretty big smile for him, Missie."

"I admit that. I admit I try to be pleasant to people."

Mrs. Kromer returned to her lemon. "That's nice," she said.

Wesley Stuart had seldom suffered from heat but he had to slow his pace for the third flight of steps and when he entered his room he found it stifling, oppressive.

He removed all of his clothes and since the only other room on the floor had been unrented for several months he walked naked across the hall to the bathroom. He filled the bathtub with cold water and sat down in it. This revived him, he could feel the strength returning to him as if the water in the tub replaced the energy he had lost through his pores. His body was suntanned and he stared at the contrast of his legs with the white of the tub. He flexed the toes of his right foot and watched the ligaments tighten in his ankle and, as he bent his knee, his calf hardened against his thigh. Then he submerged his entire leg and watched the sunbleached hairs float upwards. When he removed his leg from the water these white hairs clung slick to his brown skin and he continued stupidly fascinated with this solitary game of bending and unbending his knee until his back began to ache from it and then he lay down and using his hands as cups poured water all over his head and chest.

When he had dried himself Wesley walked across the hall to his room and lay down on the bed. With the movement of air from the open window and from the skylight in the hall, his room seemed less oppressive to him. Enjoying this comfort, he closed his eyes.

Some minutes later Wesley sat upright in bed and then he heard a shout which must have come from his own throat.

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Another person was in the room. At the sound of Wesley's voice the man took several steps backward and now he was standing in the doorway.

Suddenly conscious of his own nakedness, Wesley drew the bedspread about his body. There was no way to account for the presence of someone else, uninvited, in his own room. But he had been lying here for some undeterminable length of time and since twilight had already taken place in the city it seemed possible and even likely that this silhouette against the pale column of gray from the skylight might be a figure dreamed up, imagined.

But now as he stared at it, certain features became more distinct: its thick body erect as a sentry, its head thrown back as if listening, the shadow of a stick extending from its hand to the floor. Then it moved. The stick was raised a few inches from the floor and the man rapped it against the frame of the open door. Wesley called out to him but the visitor did not seem to hear. Then Wesley reached toward the ceiling and pulled the string that turned on the light.

In the moment before his eyes became accustomed to the light he cursed and shouted as the man in the doorway stared into the room. Suddenly Wesley was silent. First he had seen the white cane and when his eyes returned to the man's face he realized he was dealing with a blind man. Now he saw a fine white cord extending from a black button in the man's ear. When he could speak, Wesley asked the man what he wanted but the stranger touched the floor with his cane, turned and began to walk slowly down the hall in the direction of the stairs.

Wesley quickly stepped into his trousers and hurried to door. The man had begun to descend the stairs.

"Hey mister, wait a minute," Wesley said. Then he shouted, "Hey! Wait a minute, will you?"

The man stopped, turned to face Wesley and said, "Somebody talking to me?"

"Yeah. I am. You just knocked on my door. What d'you want?"

"Would you mind talking into this?" He indicated a

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small square microphone pinned to his shirt. Wesley saw the cord that disappeared under the shirt, reappeared at the collar and connected with the large black earbutton. "I don't hear very well, you have to shout." His voice was low and even, without melody.

Wesley bent down and spoke directly into the microphone: "When you came to my door, I was sleeping. I'm sorry I didn't hear you. Is there anything I can do?"

"I found this card in my door," the blind man said, "and I wanted to ask you to read it to me." Wesley took the card and then he looked at the man's face. He was young, stocky, probably in his late twenties. His skin was ruddy, healthy looking, but it shone with a kind of waxen glaze that seemed unreal. His nose was straight and well shaped with large tensed nostrils, his jaw square and thick, divided in the center by a deep cleft. He was probably handsome, Wesley thought, but his eyes were disturbing; the almost undefined areas of pale blue faded into the dead whites as if they were the eyes of a badly painted toy doll.

Wesley looked at the card. "It's from the census taker. He wants you to fill it out and drop it into the mail box. Do you live in this building?"

"Since noon. I live in the room across the hall. My name is Earl." He thrust his hand forward. Wesley looked at the extended hand, strong and square, and he noticed that the nails were clean, neatly filed; he stared as if he had never seen a hand before, and then he gripped it with his own and said, "I'm Wesley Stuart."

Then Earl invited him to look at his room. Wesley followed the blind man into the tiny dormer room which he had seen many times before. He knew there was a window at one end, a bed, a dresser and a chair, and nothing more. Earl flipped the light switch but the room remained in darkness. The blind man moved skillfully into the dark and now Wesley could see only his silhouette against the window.

"The bed's hard but I like it that way, you get better rest. And it's got a dresser. See?" Earl moved into a black corner and Wesley could no longer see him at all. "I've got

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my toilet articles laid out here so I know just where to find them. And here's a chair I'll use to read in. I read quite a bit." He picked up a large book of perforated cardboard and carried it to the bed. "This is the new *Reader's Digest.* I get it every month."

Wesley, seated on the bed, wondered if he should tell Earl that the light bulb was broken; it seemed strange to be in a room with someone who needed to be told that the light was not burning and even stranger to think that this person's rooms would always be dark. Then, to try blindness for himself, he closed his eyes.

"Are you still here?" Earl said. Listening with his eyes closed, Wesley thought that for Earl all people must simply be voices without bodies. He cupped his hands over his ears and heard a voice from faraway, "*Wesley? Where are you? You still here?*" And it occurred to him that if he refused to answer and if all the people in the world were suddenly blind and deaf he might cease to exist, except inside of himself, a ghost in a dark and silent shell.

"I'm still here," he said. "I'm on the bed." And now his own voice sounded to his covered ears like the voice of another, a stranger outside of himself, or as if his own ghost were whispering to him.

"Why didn't you answer me?" Earl said.

Wesley opened his eyes and rose from the bed. "You better tell Mrs. Kromer to put a new light bulb in here."

"Doesn't it work?"

"No, it doesn't. It's burnt out." Then he excused himself and returned to his apartment. After his experiment in blindness the light shocked his eyes and everything seemed more clearly defined than before: imperfections in the plaster he had never noticed now seemed shabby, the green of the bedspread and the white of the table were startling, almost gaudy.

He opened the refrigerator and found a plate of canned ham and some leftover potato salad. When he had set his table his thoughts turned again to Earl. Wesley was proud of his room and though he realized that the care and imagi-

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nation with which he had transformed this attic into a splendid apartment would be lost on a visitor who could not see, he knew that Earl who, like all blind people, must be devoted to order, would appreciate the ingenuity with which he had used his space: since the roof of the house was a gabled one there were three alcoves; one of these he used for sleeping, another for cooking and eating, and a third for reading. He went to the door of the room across the hall.

"Earl!"

"Yeah?"

"I wondered if you'd had your dinner?"

"Is it Wesley?"

"Yeah. Have y'eaten yet?"

Earl appeared smiling in the hall and Wesley led the way to a corner near the window of his large room. He directed Earl to a chair and Earl sat down. Then Wesley went to the cupboard to fetch another plate and more silverware.

He reapportioned the food and sat down. Earl placed his fingers lightly on the food and then he said, "Would you mind cutting the meat for me?" Wesley cut the meat into small pieces. He couldn't remember having watched a blind man eat before and he was fascinated. Earl's eyes were directed at Wesley's mouth and Wesley, embarrassed, turned his gaze to his own plate before he realized again that all the pictures that took shape behind Earl's eyes were of his own making, and for a moment Wesley looked at the blind man, trying to gather this fact into him, to accustom himself to its strangeness.

Earl stabbed a piece of the ham with his fork and raised it to his mouth. Wesley felt a shiver that started in the back of his head and ran down the length of his entire body. This disturbed him. After a moment Earl's plate was empty, but Wesley had eaten nothing. He had lost his appetite, the food seemed repulsive to him.

"Would you like more, Earl?"

"Sure, if you've got plenty."

"Got more than I can eat." Wesley took Earl's plate away and replaced it with his own. Then he looked at the

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empty plate in his hand and something terrible happened: the plate sent a strangely soft shock into his hands that travelled through his body; this caused him to drop the plate and it smashed on the floor.

Earl stopped eating for a moment. He sat upright, cocked his head to one side; his large nostrils flared tensely as if they were instruments to hear through. But he said nothing and after a moment continued to eat.

Wesley brought out his broom and while he swept the broken pieces of dimestore pottery into the dustpan he wondered what had caused the dish to fall from his hand. Perhaps some electricity had been conducted from the battery of Earl's hearing aid; but this seemed improbable. He wondered if he might be squeamish about Earl's afflictions. If this were the case he must certainly teach himself to get over it.

After the meal the two men smoked several cigarets while Earl, stimulated by questions from Wesley, told of the sickness, pneumonia, which had resulted in his loss of sight and impaired hearing. This had come about when he was seven years old. He told Wesley that his last visual memory was of snow falling on pine trees in the hills near his home in New Hampshire on the night his mother had driven him to the hospital. He spoke pleasantly and without bitterness for more than an hour and Wesley would have listened longer and willingly to this voice that came from a world so strange to him; but Earl rose to leave. He explained that the night was his best time for work. He carried into the streets a box of leathergoods made by the blind and sold them in restaurants and cafés, lunch counters and beer halls; he said that in the daytime, especially during this heat spell, few persons were willing even to stop and examine his wares.

He thanked Wesley for the meal and then he went out into the streets.

Now this small offering of a meal to an afflicted person is a usual and every day occurence in the world, but not in the world of Wesley Stuart. The fact that he lived in a city where there were other people should not be interpreted to mean that he lived with them or even among them; for in

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spite of appearances he had in him all the makings of a hermit and may as well have lived in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

Early in his life, in a small city in Central Ohio, Wesley had taken part in a war that was fought day and night in his own home; and in this war the weapons used had been of the most visciously subtle variety known to man: silence, withdrawal, a kind of passive hatred from which emanated death rays that worked more slowly but with a more terrible effectiveness than any imagined by the meanest of scientists: for the victim must go through his life on the surface unharmed, but inside of him, still mechanically pumping blood, lies a tiny poisoned corpse.

The issues at stake had been forgotten long before Wesley's birth; but as can happen in any war the fighting continued because neither side knew how to stop. Wesley at first had been more a witness than a target to all this quiet commotion and murder, but the circle of fire grew steadily larger until it included him. Harold and Irma Stuart, until their divorce—long after Wesley left home—had taken turns withdrawing: Harold Stuart would spend every second night drinking at a beer garden poker party; on alternate nights Irma Stuart would attend one of her clubs, chair a book discussion or play bridge. Wesley spent one evening with his father and the following with his mother: the first poring over school books and the second at play. For many years he worked at a puppet stage made from a large toilet paper carton in which groceries had been delivered, but his father thought it was a doll house of some sort and when Wesley began suddenly to grow taller, Harold Stuart's annoyance with this game reached its peak. He stuffed the puppets and the stage into an incinerator and lighted a match to them. That Saturday afternoon while this fire was still burning Wesley listened to a long and dispiteous lecture on the differences between childhood and maturity. His father had apparently given considerable drunken thought to the ways in which a "man" does not behave. He disapproved of each of the few friends Wesley had at one time and another managed to win; the

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truth was that he did not want them underfoot, they caused in him a peculiar disquiet which increased his unhappiness and so he discouraged or forbade these alliances. Wesley was left to continue in his solitude, but without the puppets; and when the time came he discovered the usual private amusement of which many fathers seem to know nothing.

But undermined by a strong distrust of others, Wesley's imagination centered more and more in himself and there was a long period, perhaps two years or more, in which every word said to him had to be spoken twice. For it is known that a person's thoughts can travel no distance greater than the distance to the self; one may think of China, or the moon, and at the same time hear and see all that goes on about him, but when the thoughts are buried deep within the carnival mazes of his own heart, a person may as well be deaf and blind.

Between father and son then the situation was a simple one: they disliked one another with the quiet formality of estranged lovers. But Irma Stuart was another problem altogether. This was a woman whom Wesley alternately hated and loved. At times, early in his life, he had welcomed and even invited her affection, but just as often he had been repelled by it. She seemed boneless. Her face was yellow white. She had soft hysterical eyes. Her hands wiggled and crawled like white wrinkled worms. Except for the times when she laughed, which were too frequent, Irma Stuart smiled continually, but this apparently gay activity was more frightening to Wesley than a frown or a scream might have been. The desperation of a woman who screams is usually a temporary state, but the desperation of a woman who laughs in these haunting depthless tones is probably a permanent condition, a portrait of the soul. Even small children see these portraits and understand them. Each cackle from Irma Stuart's throat echoed an agony of unfulfillment, bitterness: the nerve show of a dead heart dressed in hysteria.

Often she seemed to pretend that Wesley did not exist, but these periods would be broken by sudden bursts of kindness, loving gestures, unexpected wisdoms. On one such occasion,

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when Wesley was seventeen, she signed a paper authorizing his enlistment in the Navy.

Wesley believed that with this separation he had won the long war against his father. But now and again in small ways that he understood and in ways too profound to be understood at all, it was clear that the war continued, that Wesley carried the enemy, his father, within himself. Certain words and ideas, tiny acts of destructiveness toward others, would bring about sudden flashes of clarity in which he could see in himself his father's image. At times even in the mirror the spectacle of that familiar brutality—eyes temporarily shrunken with hatred, mouth withdrawn to a mean bloodless slit—would suck the color from his face and leave him white with dread. But a more dangerous similarity was his inability to cope with others. From any relationship not directly involved with earning his livelihood, he automatically withdrew. And he nurtured this isolation with the loving care of a mother for a child, for within it he was at peace.

This was something Wesley knew nothing of: this strange family of three which waged its endless war on the quiet battleground of his solitude: how like a mother he cooked and kept house and how like a father he thwarted the love that was in him and like an infant lay revelling in the false security of this twisted and solitary crib.

Wesley had learned carpentry in the Navy and now he worked building platforms and sets at a television station in Hollywood. But he did not want to live in that city. Some men might be attracted by the nightlife that is supposed to go on in Hollywood but whenever Wesley remained there even until twilight a certain disquiet arose in him that would sometimes last for several days. Another carpenter named George Dunlap had once asked why Wesley lived in Pasadena. Wesley said he was not sure himself but it seemed to him everybody in Hollywood, even the people on the streets, were somehow hysterical, out of their minds. George said they'd never seemed that way to him and that ended it.

But Wesley had other reasons for preferring to drive back and forth each day. Some of these reasons he understood

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and others he did not think about. In the first place he liked to use his car. The weather in California is usually decent and you can drive with the top down and get sunshine on your face and arms except during the winter months but even they are mild and pass quickly. And in the second place he liked his apartment and did not want to give it up for new people, strangers, to live in. This room in the made-over attic of Mrs. Kromer's old frame house was only two blocks from the speedway connecting the two cities (he could drive it in twenty-seven minutes) and he had come to think of it as home.

His life was composed of these four major parts: himself, his apartment, his car and his bankbook. The job was not really a part of this. It merely relieved him of excess energies and allowed him to pay the rent on his apartment and the upkeep on his car and caused the figure in the bankbook to swell at a steady and reassuring rate. If he saved for anything at all, it was for insurance against change. Wesley failed to realize that all the money in the world could not purchase such a policy and the waste involved in hoping for it did not seem to offer any serious threat. He looked upon waste as somewhat less deteriorating than pain; and therefore he looked upon this lonely freedom from experience as a possession like his car, the apartment or his bankbook, a treasure to be cared for and protected.

2

One power a solitary person often holds over others is a certain inscrutable charm; there is about such a person an aura of otherworldly calm, a suggestion of mysteries unsolved, of depths unplumbed, some obscure promise of romance. And when this charm is coupled with youth, there is often a banging on his door by someone who, thinking it may be of value, has come to steal the secret.

Mrs. Faye Zelger Young lived on the first floor in a dark and untidy room across the hall from the landlady. She was a girl of medium height with small breasts and large hips and

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she called herself Miss Faye Zelger because for the past five years the Mrs. and the Young no longer applied and she could see no reason for using them: a Mrs. on a name tied a woman down. She had followed her husband to the West Coast in order to be with him during the weeks before he was sent overseas and then had stayed on here living on his allotment checks. When the wire came announcing his death in the last days of the war, Faye was just eighteen. Her parents lived in a small town on the edge of a great swamp in the interior of Florida. Her daddy was away from home most of the time working for the government—inspecting trees, she thought, but she wasn't just sure—and her mamma was cranky. There was no reason to go back there, none that was worth the busfare. Besides, after that terrible news Faye had been in the mood for a little sympathy and since her mother never had thought much of Sergeant Bernie K. Young —he had habits that made her nervous, made popping noises with chewing gum and scratched himself no matter who was around to see what it was that itched—it was not likely this cranky old woman, her own mother, would be much comfort to her.

The government sent an insurance check regularly but it was not large and Faye went to work selling cosmetics in a ten-cent store on Colorado Boulevard. Faye herself used nothing but lipstick and the customers bored her so that after three weeks she begged the manager to transfer her to some other counter—hardware, housewares, dry goods for men—anything but cosmetics would have fitted her just as perfectly as a glove. But he refused and she gave the job up, determined to skimp through as best she could on the government money. She moved into Mrs. Kromer's for six dollars a week and waited for something more suitable to come along.

Faye was pretty. She had light hair, naturally curly, and called herself a dark blonde. She was proud of this hair and aside from parting it on the left and trimming it with her own scissors, she let it do just as it pleased: fall in large soft waves down to her shoulders. Often it fell over her face, partly obscuring the vision of her right eye. If she were

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alone, Faye would screw up her mouth and blow the hair back where it belonged, but in the presence of someone who mattered to her she would do one of three things: roll her head to the right and jerk her head suddenly backward, lift her hand spread-fingered and deal with it directly, or simply let it fall and look at him out of one and a half eyes. Once at a cocktail bar in Hollywood she'd met a director who told her that if she'd cut her hair and work hard to get rid of that Southern accent, he'd see what he could do about getting her into pictures. She went to a beauty parlor on the Sunset Strip to have it cut by a man who was supposed to be famous for his work on picture people but he'd made an awful mess of it and she vowed once it grew out she'd never set foot in one of those places again. Once was enough. Then the director turned out to be a snake-in-the-grass and Faye wrote her mother that she'd had a good offer from the movies but the studio wanted her to change her personality and if they didn't like her the way she was, well, she was sorry, that's all, *damn* sorry.

Now when a person asked Faye what she did, she might tell him she was an actress. And if he asked what she'd done, she'd lift her shoulders and close her eyes and laugh: "What have I *not* done, my dear, what have I *not* done?" When pressed further on this subject or on any other for which the truth was inconvenient she would turn her face squarely to the person sitting next to her—perhaps it would be at a cocktail bar somewhere, some perfectly all right place where *even a nun* could sit at the bar without anybody getting too smart for his pants—and smile, knitting her brows in a way that suggested some mysterious never-to-be-forgotten pain: "Lover," she would say, "if there is one subject that absolutely and surely depresses me, it is the past." And likely as not she would squeeze his hand, light a cigaret and ask him to tell her a story.

Wesley Stuart did not know Faye well at all. They had spoken often on the front porch and in the halls of the house and once at her suggestion she had come up to see his apartment. On this occasion they had smoked cigarets together

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and talked quietly for a quarter of an hour and at the close of the visit she had extracted from Wesley the promise to invite her for dinner "some time soon", though it hadn't occurred to him that she might not only remember but hide in the halls waiting to arrange what would seem to be a chance encounter so that she might remind him of the promise and hold him to it.

On the morning following his evening with the blind man, Wesley found Faye once again waiting at the base of the stairwell. She had at first seemed to him a much older person, certainly as old as himself, for although her face was clear and fresh, the skin seemed to have lost that vaguely incandescent brightness of people still in their very early twenties. And her manner had seemed older: wise, and perhaps somewhat bored. He had admired the way her mouth attacked a cigaret while her eyes, hard and steady, remained focused on his, and her almost wicked quality of seeming incapable of surprise. But now, standing in the hallway with her hands behind her back and her tiny bosoms thrust forward, there was a nervous brightness in her eyes that made her seem almost coy, inexperienced. This made Wesley uncomfortable but he responded to her greeting with a smile and Faye walked with him down the hallway to the front door.

Mrs. Kromer was seated where he had left her the night before but she was no longer sucking a lemon. On her lap, unopened, was a large black book entitled *Morning Meditations* by Anna Hope Barneweller. Mrs. Kroner's hands were busy adjusting a large comb under the great untidy knot of graying brown hair that sat on top of her head. Mrs. Kromer, when the weather had been normal, was a talkative woman but these past few days she had lapsed into a silence that was only broken by incomplete phrases. She called these days a period for meditation.

Faye sat with her on the porch and the two women watched Wesley's car pull out from the curb. They followed it with their eyes until it turned into the speedway two blocks from the house.

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"Drives too fast," said Mrs. Kromer. She worried about everyone she knew, but Mr. Stuart was one of the special burdens of her meditations. So were Faye and many of the other tenants. But Wesley Stuart in particular. Mrs. Kromer believed she could detect the needs, the fears, the inner tremblings of another entity as surely as a Geiger counter could detect the presence of radioactivity. Some persons, according to Anna Hope Barneweller, had this divine faculty and Mrs. Kromer believed she herself fitted the description in Mrs. Barneweller's book. Mrs. Barneweller also admonished these special persons, her readers, against unwise intervention in the affairs of others. Mrs. Kromer had constantly to restrain herself. But she believed privately that certain tiny seeds planted graciously from time to time might find some degree of fertility in their minds.

She believed she had come to understand the source of Mr. Stuart's problem and that she knew the exact nature of the peril to which his soul was exposed. Certain deductions she had made simply from observation: his eyes, for example, told of worry and sleepless nights. They were china blue and as bright as new lacquer but the whites were flecked with red and just below the eyes she had noticed the subtle beginnings of death, a process which, though it might continue for another fifty years, was nevertheless in evidence on the vaguely dark and discolored sacs of skin: this indicated a troubled soul. His nose dipped upward, little-boy-fashion she called it, and his mouth, because the nose was small, seemed extravagantly large; the skin of his lips was thin and it windowed the dark color of blood underneath, profoundly red, the lips of a man in fever. His head was of a size reasonably proportionate to his slight body, and his hair was curly and blonde, almost white. A pate of pink showed through at the back of his head and the hairline had begun definitely to recede.

During the years in which Mr. Stuart had occupied the room on the fourth floor, Mrs. Kromer had gathered only the most ordinary factual data on his private affairs : he paid his rent regularly, he did not drink whiskey though he kept a

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bottle of it in a bureau drawer, he smoked but she was quite certain he did not smoke in bed, his sole correspondent was his mother in Ohio, he made heaps of money somewhere in Hollywood, and he was a lone wolf sort of a person who did not entertain often.

Aside from these facts she had another more important piece of information gathered some weeks ago in the middle of a rainy night. On a tour of the building to check and close all doors and windows against the storm, she had passed through the hall outside of Mrs. Stuart's room at two in the morning just in time to hear certain strange and irregular sounds from within. His voice was calling out in the night. He seemed to be strangling. She listened for a moment to the choked cries intermingled with a forlorn kind of weeping. Fearless, protected as always by her belief in a world of predominant good, she had knocked on the door. The sounds continued. She quickly singled out the master key from the large ring hanging at her waist, unlocked the door, entered and turned on the light.

Mr. Stuart had sat up in bed. His angry eyes glossy as one gone mad, he stared at her and shouted some unrepeatable curse. Mrs. Kromer walked directly to his bed, raised her arm, paused for a moment to eye her target: within a fragment of a second, her hand had landed with a great smacking sound on his face.

He began to cry.

Mrs. Kromer went to the sink under the window in his kitchen alcove. She soaked a dish towel in cold water from the tap and, returning to his side, begged him to lie down. He obeyed instantly and Mrs. Kromer applied the wet towel to his face and informed him he had been dreaming. Wesley began feebly to protest that it was not a dream, someone had actually been trying to... *Trying to what?* Shocked into more complete wakefulness by contact with the cold towel, he could no longer remember the details of the dream.

Mrs. Kromer returned to the kitchen area and lighted a fire under a pan of water. This was for tea. Then she drew a chair to the edge of his bed and sat down.

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"Someone trying to do what?" she said.

To please her, Wesley invented an answer: "Trying to climb in that window."

The time had come, thought Mrs. Kromer, to plant a small seed. She pointed at the window next to his bed. "That one? Four stories up? Mr. Stuart, the only person *tall* enough to climb in that window is God. And when he comes in you got nothing to worry about."

She told him some more about God and though Wesley did not listen carefully, he liked the sound of her voice. There was strength in her big ugly bearfootedness and her lantern jaw swung with such homely vigor when she spoke that he could not for a moment doubt the goodness of her intentions. When she had brewed the tea and poured it into cups, Mrs. Kromer began to inquire about the general nature of his dreams and while they drank the tea Wesley told of an incident he had dreamed several times:

He is called down to the morgue to identify a person killed on a sidewalk by an automobile that has gone wild. Wesley is led into a large room with shiny black walls. In the center of this room is a body reclining on a slab of white marble. An attendant uncovers the body and Wesley begins to weep; in the dream he sees himself standing over the slab weeping aloud like a child. A friend appears and conducts Wesley from the room into a vestibule that is filled with people who watch him weep and, unashamed, shouting hysterically, the waters of his sorrow rivering down over his red face, he is helped into a waiting taxi. When Wesley awakens from this dream his face is usually wet with real tears and for several minutes his mind, in an effort to identify the face of the corpse, stares at the memory of the dreamed-up slab. No face appears there however and this is a painful frustration, this struggle in vain to discover whose dream death has caused him to weep.

"I see," said Mrs. Kromer sadly, sympathetically, her eyes focused on the sloping wall over his head. "Mm-*hmmm!* Now I understand many things about you I'd given plenty of wonder to. Why it is you're a bachelor for instance is all

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perfickly clear to me now." She lowered her voice and looked into his eyes. "You know who it was you seen on that slab, Mr. Stuart?"

Wesley shook his head. Mrs. Kromer took a long swallow of tea and sank back into her chair. "It was y'self!"

Wesley was annoyed that she should seem so confident her interpretation was the correct one; but he wanted to hear more. "Does that mean I'm going to die in a car accident?"

"Not a thing of the kind. Forget that, son. All you got to do is remember this: the only death a living person ever mourns is his own."

Wesley tried to hide his irritation behind a smile. "But I'm not *dead*."

Mrs. Kromer's mouth opened in a sympathetic grin that showed false teeth and dark red artificial gums. She smiled for a long time and then she said: "Are you sure about that Mr. Stuart?"

After a moment, she rose. "Maybe you'd like to get some sleep." But before she reached the door, Wesley's voice had stopped her. "Mrs. Kromer!"

"Yes, son?"

"I thought you might like more tea."

"Well," she said. "I surely would."

And soon she was embarked on a discussion of a certain theory she believed in: namely, that when a man gives up his belief in love, his soul dies. Everyone has some certain person cut for him by the Almighty and if a man doesn't ever happen to have privelege of meeting his certain person, he must not brood on this sad destiny. The Bible said self-pity stunk and so the only thing left to do was to devote the balance of his lonely sojourn, just as she had done, to doing good for others—and certainly each tiny act of benevolence would be returned to him a thousand fold. *At least!*

"Now," she concluded, placing her cool hand over his hot moist one, "you must thank God for sending me up here to interpret your dream for you."

Wesley could not resist asking if he should also thank God for murdering his soul but the moment the words were out,

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he regretted them. Mrs. Kromer removed her hand from his and as it returned to her lap the forefinger waved to and fro warningly: "Woe betide him who mocketh my words," she said, inventing a quotation. Then her great jaw swung back and forth once again and she continued, "You see, Mr. Stuart, you and me just might—just *might*, I say, be bearing the same cross."

"You mean you've never met your certain person either?"

"Never *met* him exactly—but I know who he is. My certain person lives in China. Comes to me quite often in my meditations. But Lord, I'm an old woman, Mr. Stuart. It's too late. They's four hundred million people in China. I looked it up once."

Wesley tried to imagine Mrs. Kromer in the Orient, her great fleshless bones, her large occidental eyes, hyperthyroid and slightly wild, her long feet bound in delicate silk sandals, seated crosslegged under an Asiatic sun, a parasol over her head...

"It was never intended. Not for *this* lifetime. But I'm a patient woman. What was intended was I should make a mistake, so I did. That was Bartholomew. After a few years he wandered away, but I don't blame him. 'F he hadn't, *I* would've. Providence moveth in mysterious ways."

Wesley was grateful to the old hag for her kindness; her presence had been diverting and he was comforted. He smiled and Mrs. Kromer, who felt that this smile alone had rewarded her, told him so.

They fell silent and for a long time there was only the pleasant noise of tea being drunk in the night, the swallowing, the stirring, the intimate clink of cups on saucers. When he looked at Mrs. Kromer her great eyes were half closed but in the centers of the pupils he saw a strong and tiny light shining as motionlessly as a star. She spoke and her voice was small.

"I think about that man a whole lot."

"Who?"

"That Chinaman," she said.

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3

Faye Zelger spent most of her Wednesday morning on the front porch looking through back issues of *Life* and *Look*. Along about noon she wandered up to Colorado Boulevard and ate her lunch in a drug store. There were big fans grinding the air into motion, false icicles gleamed on the pie cases; and with this illusion of coolness she was able to collect her thoughts.

She wanted to make a special impression on Wesley Stuart when she appeared for dinner on the fourth floor at seven-thirty. Faye wasn't sure she *liked* him or anything like that but he seemed always so far off into himself that it might be fun to pull him out a little bit, not to tease him exactly but maybe to make him nervous, show him somebody else was alive besides himself. She didn't want to start anything but it just *got* her the way he didn't mind the hot weather and the smog and smiled at poor Mrs. Kromer squeezing lemons all over herself to keep cool, and ran up the stairs two at a time as if there was something just *marvelous* up there waiting for him, and in the mornings the way his car zoomed forward even before he had the door shut: close your eyes and count five, Alacazam! he's halfway to Hollywood.

Smart!

She hoped he realized there was at least one party wasn't impressed with his working in Hollywood; principally Miss Faye Zelger of Oskachee, Florida. Besides he was in television which was *not* movies and if he'd ever seen half as many stars as she had, Wesley'd probably fall flat on his face. Faye was laughing inside and when she saw herself in the mirror behind the pie case, there was a smile on her face. She had a good long afternoon to plan her entrance and Honey, she told herself, *you*'ll make him wiggle if you have to walk in naked, stark raving naked.

Faye gulped down the last of her ice water and hurried out of there but the manager or somebody who acted like he *thought* he was the manager shouted after her to come back and pay

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her check. Embarrassing? The people on the sidewalk stared at her like she was Tokyo Rose or somebody just as godawful. Probably tourists, she thought. She went back to the cashier and paid her bill. The manager tried to smile at her but she cut him dead and told the cashier to kindly tell Mr. Priss it'd be a merry Christmas in April before he saw *her* again and maybe if the food was halfways decent the customers wouldn't forget to pay for it. Of course the cashier wouldn't condescend to answer, his black bow tie probably choked the voice right out of his skinny little throat. And if the tie didn't, she'd like to have a try at it herself. Black bow tie in this weather? What'd he think his tacky little drugstore was, the Mocombo night club? Lord how she hated prissy men!

The smog caused her eyes to itch but Faye knew better than to rub. That starts them burning and they turn red and stay red for days. She hurried home and by the time she reached the front porch her dress was soaked with perspiration. Mrs. Kromer stood behind the screen door swatting flies.

"You look flustered, Missie."

"I expect I do," Faye said.

"Somethin' wrong?"

"Oh nothin' atall, I was just flatly accused of bein' a thief is all—by some fairy in a drugstore no less. Humiliated before the entire city of Pasadena for fifty-nine cents plus tax." Faye opened the door. "Got half a notion to sue," she said and started down the hall.

"Shame on you," said Mrs. Kromer.

Faye stood still. "Shame on *which?*"

"Not very sweet, those words you use, milady."

"What words?"

"What you said that man was."

Faye shrugged and smiled. "Huh! It's a known fact they can't stand a pretty girl." She continued down the hall.

By five-thirty, after a long sleepless rest and a lukewarm bath, Faye had devised her plan: dolling up surely would be

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a fat mistake. She would walk in looking like hell itself, perhaps in overalls, breathless, hair all a mess, no lipstick; and late, twenty minutes at least—or just long enough for Wesley Stuart to get it into his blue-eyed head that at least one person didn't give the tiniest damn. But at six-thirty she had decided on lipstick and just as she was about to walk out the door, Faye caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror: her hair looked like Spanish moss and it wouldn't do. So she brushed it. At a quarter of seven, radiant in a sleeveless summer cotton dress—simple lines, pale yellow—Faye knocked on Wesley's door. "Yoo-hoo," she sang.

Wesley was tearing a head of lettuce apart with his fingers. He smiled a bright smile. "Hi. Make yourself at home." Faye sat down and Wesley said, "You look very nice. Like a million dollars."

"Thank you, Wesley, though I don't know why I should, I've had a perfectly miserable day."

"Oh? I'm sorry to hear it."

Faye expected him to question her about the crisis implied in her remark; she waited, and then Wesley said, "I'm a little slow tonight. Haven't even got the table set."

Faye sprang to her feet. "Do let me help, Wesley."

"Oh no. No." He was emphatic.

Faye eyed a package of cigarets on the stand next to her.

"May I smoke one of your cigarets then?"

"Of course. Help yourself."

"I love king-size. Is this that new brand you can smoke underwater?"

Wesley took three yellow plates and three yellow saucers from the cupboard and set them on the table. "What'd you say?"

"Oh, I was just makin' conversation. Do I see *three?*"

"Three what?"

"Places. Are you settin' *three* places?"

"Oh yeah, yeah. I meant to—uh..."

"You meant to tell me. Well, I won't pretend I'm not disappointed. Who is this third party? Some glamorous Hollywood creature?"

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"It's the man across the hall. He stopped in to say hello. And I thought all this food—I bought too much anyway."

Faye was furious but it wouldn't do to show it. She sucked quietly at her cigaret and after a moment she said, "Wesley, I don't want you to hate me or think anything dreadful but I just—I really don't think I could face it after the day I've had."

"Face what?"

"That man. I know it's awful but he makes me feel—I don't know *how* he makes me feel but—"

"You mean because he's blind?"

"I suppose so. And deaf. That's terrible, isn't it?"

"No, it's not terrible. I felt funny about it at first. Last night—"

"He ate here *last* night? And he's eatin' here tonight, too?"

"Faye, I don't think he's got much money. He sells leather billfolds."

"Yes, I know. In beer gardens."

"And his mother sends him a little each week. She works in a mill somewhere in New England. I guess I felt sorry for him."

"You mean, Wesley, he told you all those personal things, just like that, to a stranger?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Well, he's probably just as sweet as he can be but don't you think its funny? Hasn't he got an awful nerve?"

"I don't think so. Blind people are probably—you know, lonesome. And he can't hardly hear either, don't forget that."

Faye smoked quietly for a moment and watched Wesley who stood at the table cutting large slices from a cheesecake. He seemed so contented that Faye wanted to walk over to the table and pick up a piece of the cheesecake with her bare hands and grind it into his face. Instead she ground out her cigaret and walked over to stand opposite him.

She rested her elbows on the table and held her face in her hands. "Wesley? she began, "what would you think of

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Faye if she asked for a rain check. 'Cause honey, I can relax with you alone I'm sure, but strangers always make me fidgit and I'm so nervous to start with this evenin' I'd probably make *mis*erable company. You can understand that, can't you?"

"I'll be disappointed," he said, "but I wouldn't want you to be —well, uncomfortable."

"I had a hunch you'd be sweet about it."

Earl appeared at the door. He said hello and Wesley shouted to him to come in and sit down. Earl wore a blue sport shirt open at the throat and he was cleanly shaven; his face shone, he smelled of shaving lotion and his dark hair was slicked back with water. Faye watched as Wesley conducted him to a chair and then she lighted another cigaret and moved to Earl's side. "Remember me, honey?" she said. "I met you on the front porch yesterday."

Earl lifted his head and adjusted the volume on his hearing aid.

Wesley shouted to him from the table: "You remember Faye Zelger, the girl who lives downstairs?"

Earl smiled. "Is she here?"

Faye, flattered by the smile, rested her hand on his forearm.

"Right here, Earlzie," she shouted. "How's business? Sellin' lots of belts and billfolds and things?"

"Not too many," he said. "You going to be here for dinner?"

"If Wesley'll let me. Wesley? Can I stay for dinner?"

Wesley let her know she was welcome to do just as she pleased.

"You talking to me?" Earl said.

Faye leaned over and spoke directly into the microphone on Earl's chest. "Why don't you turn the volume up, honey? Then a girl won't have to shout so." She touched the microphone with her hand. "Here, let me show you."

"Can't turn it any louder," Earl said.

"Course you can." She twisted the tiny button on the side of the instrument and then, quietly, she said, "Now Earlzie, how's business?"

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Earl frowned and gripped the chair arms with his hands. "I said it was none too good."

"There! You heard every word I said."

Wesley watched with interest and then he said, "You shouldn't do that, Faye. Maybe it's hard on the battery."

"That's foolish. He can get another one. A person ought to use what they got while they got it. Isn't that right, Earlzie?"

Earl adjusted the volume to its proper level. "Not always, Faye. It hurts my ear, gives me a headache."

Faye hid her face in her hands and gasped with remorse. Then she whispered to Wesley: "I'm sorry, Wesley, I just don't know how to act with him. Don't you think I better come back sometime when it's just the two of us?"

"Whatever you say. Only I don't think you should whisper."

"Well, I'm *sorry*." Faye made a miserable little attempt at laughter. "I'm not usually so awful, it's just this dreadful day I've had." Then, returning to Earl, she shouted, "I'll be seein' you, Earl, I'm on the front porch quite a bit." She squeezed his hand. "G'bye."

Faye ran down the three flights of stairs and down the hall to the front porch. But the chairs were empty and she did not want to sit alone. A fat old woman walked slowly past the house pushing a baby carriage and on the steps of the house across the street a red glare from a cigaret moved lazily to someone's lips. But it was dark and she could not see who the person was.

4

Three weeks passed but the weather did not change. On certain nights a coolness set in and one could sleep with less discomfort but the smog thickened and every day the sun shone with a muted gray light that was not sunshine at all but a silvery and grimy glare like the light of hell itself; you would think some devil had taken all the oxygen from the air and replaced it with steel filings and itching powder.

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Now Earl Walker sat across the table from Wesley Stuart each morning and each night. At breakfast there was not much conversation. Wesley would explain before he left the house just what was in the cupboards and in the refrigerator and at lunchtime Earl could help himself. By this time Earl had not only learned to find what he wanted but had caused certain changes to be made in the furniture arrangements of Wesley's apartment: the dining table had been pulled out from the wall because Earl had bumped his head getting in and out; and now the radio was in a different place, next to a comfortable chair where Earl could sit and listen without adjusting the volume of his hearing aid. Under the chair he kept his bedroom slippers and to the right of the chair was a smoking stand he could flick ashes into without moving his arm more than a couple of inches. He had offered to do the dishwashing while Wesley was at work but even though he promised to use soap and get the dishes as clean as anyone could, Wesley told him to leave them; there was no need for Earl to spend so long doing what he himself could do quickly and effortlessly in the evenings.

Wesley did not feel imposed upon for Earl was the kind of companion he liked, one who never began a conversation but who seemed always to be willing to speak when he was spoken to on any subject whatever, even himself, and Wesley could end a discussion at any moment he chose simply by remaining silent. When he wanted to be alone he had only to hint at this and Earl would return to his own room or start out on his round of the cafés and beer halls; or, since he, Wesley, was unseen and only imperfectly heard, he felt he could be alone even in Earl's presence.

It was as if Wesley had continued to inhabit the fourth floor by himself but with a totally new kind of solitude. At first there had been inconveniences, the subtle changes that creep into an apartment and a life when a new person enters, but now he had become accustomed to carrying a heavier load of groceries up the stairs and a larger bag of garbage down to the street. Whatever had caused his loss of appetite during that first meal seemed now to have increased it. For

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there was some contagion in the obvious pleasure Earl took in his food. Once Wesley had remarked about this and Earl told him that when he drank milk he pictured in his mind the cow eating wildflowers, when he ate an apple he saw the tree in blossom and when he tasted something sweet he saw black men loading sugar cane onto a great white ship; and these pictures added flavors to the food that otherwise would not exist.

Now Wesley was more anxious than ever to spend his evenings quietly in his own home and in the late afternoon he drove faster across the speedway, ran more quickly than ever up the stairs to the fourth floor and prepared elaborate substantial meals in place of the quick carry-out salads and cold cuts from the delicatessen which had previously satisfied him.

One evening after dinner Earl withdrew from his pocket an envelope that contained a letter from his mother. He placed it on the table and as Wesley poured the coffee, Earl said, "Would you read this to me?" Wesley suspected from his tone that Earl anticipated something disagreeable in the letter. Then Earl said, "My mother always says I should get a minister to read her letters to me." He laughed in a particularly mirthless way which Wesley had learned to interpret; it meant something was troubling him.—"But I don't know any ministers," he added.

Wesley slit the envelope with a breadknife and Earl nervously lighted a cigaret. He sat forward in his clair, frowning as he listened:

> "Dear Earl my son—
>
> Your letter was slow reaching here. You have to put air mail on the envelope or else a air mail stamp or else it travells regular by train. Too bad you have heat as it is nice here. I dont like to ball you out but that lady wrote me again that she would make trouble for you for not paying up. She said 95 was how much you owe but she she would settle if I send 50 in little bits at a time."

Wesley thought this mention of personal finances might embarrass Earl. He stopped reading and tried to laugh

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as he said, "Maybe you *better* get a preacher to read this."

"What?"

"I said this is getting a little personal. You want me to go on with it?"

"Yes, please."

The handwriting had a pinched quality as if it had been written only with great effort by stiff fingers. The letter itself made him think of nudity, as if her tortured hand and badly spelled words were some indecent show of wounded flesh in a vaguely private zone. He continued to read:

> "Son you make it hard and I know it is not easy but people take care of themselves can not take care of you. You think so and end up oweing. I work part time and the 15 will have to go to her this week or she will make trouble as she promises. The mill has bad business now but may pick up in fall the superviser says. You live where you want but there are worst things than cold weather so maybe you will come here. But if I send again I will send the ticket and not $. I dont like to scold but you do things you have no right to and I am your mother. Well keep cool son. Why dont you go to a minister to read your mail to you? That is proper not a stranger. Well keep cool son.
>
> love your Mother"

Earl was silent for a moment and then he stood up and said, "That woman's crazy."

"Who, your mother?"

"No, my old landlady. I told her I'd pay when I could, but she kept my typewriter when I moved. Now she's got my mother all worked up."

Wesley showed him the place where his typewriter was kept, on the floor of his closet. He told Earl he could use it whenever he liked. Earl twisted the letter between his fingers and then he began to tear small pieces from it. Finally he placed the letter in his pocket and, without a word, picked up his walking stick and left the room. A few minutes later Wesley saw Earl pass his doorway. He was still frown-

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ing and the cardboard box of leather goods was tucked under his arm.

When Wesley had washed the dishes and put his apartment in order, he sat on the edge of the bed. Later, when he looked at the clock, he realized that thirty minutes had passed and he could not remember what he had been thinking; but he had memorized every irregularity in the pale green wall of his sleeping alcove and the muscles in his thighs tensed and untensed every time the clock went tick tock. Then, searching about for something to occupy him he stood up and wandered about the room.

He heard footsteps, light and quick, on the stairway and since they could not be Earl's, he went to the door. It was Faye. Even though she was smiling brightly and spoke with a singer's tones, she seemed unhappy.

"I was settin' on the verandah when Earl passed by. He said you were up here all by yourself and I took a chance you might want some company. D'you mind?"

Wesley wasn't certain whether he wanted company or not. There had been a time, before the summer, when he would have given Faye some quick answer: that he was busy or tired or on his way out. But he had lost some of his former contentedness with solitude.

"Not at all," he said. "I have to write some letters before I go to bed though, but..."

"Oh, Wesley, just *say* so. I thought—."

"No, come on in. I've got time for a cigaret at least."

Faye smiled and walked past him. "It's *so* pleasant up here, Wesley, truly pleasant. I don't know why, bein' next t' the roof, but I just love it. Always have since that first day."

Wesley sat in Earl's chair next to the radio. Faye stood smiling at him for a moment, solicitously, and this made him uneasy. But not knowing what else to do he returned her smile. Finally, Faye said, "Honey, you look wearyish. Why don't you stay right there comfortable and let Faye fix you some iced tea. In a tall glass."

"I haven't got any tall glasses, but there's tea in the refrigerator. On the top shelf in a milkbottle."

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"Oh goody, shall we have some?" She chattered as she removed ice cubes from a tray and poured the tea. "I've been so *restless* all day! This whole summer I've been actin' like a crazy women. It's not like me either, I'm usually just as calm! O'course, you don't know me, not really, Wesley, but I am. Usually that is. But with this weather—well, you'd think I was possessed by a whole tribe of devils or some Saint Vitus, I can't sit still. What d'you suppose it is maybe?"

Wesley only half listened. "Maybe the weather."

"Weather? Why most people it perfectly paralyzes. Except you of course. Wesley, I do envy you, always have. *Nothin'* seems to bother you, simply nothin'! I do admire that so in a man. Far as you're concerned we could all just drop dead, an' it wouldn't bother you an iota. I don't mean you're not *hu*man, but just sort of above it all. Did I offend you?"

"Oh no. You didn't offend me."

"Cause I meant it as a compliment. It's part of bein' intelligent, I think. A person like you a girl could prob'ly tell anything at all to and you wouldn't even bat an eye. I like that in a man, just to be a person's self with him. Sugar?"

"Huh?"

"You want sugar?" She laughed. "You thought I was callin' you sweet names, didn't you?"

"Yes please. One heaping."

"I talk too much, don't I? Go on, admit it. I do!"

She handed him the glass of tea and then she drew a chair from the kitchen table and sat facing him.

Wesley said, "I'd always rather listen than talk."

"That's what so many people say. They say I may talk too much but I do it so amusingly they don't mind to sit and listen. *I* don't think I'm amusing though. It's just this summer nervousness. Oh how this dress *clings* to me. Weather like this I'd as soon be a dragonfly in the swamp somewhere. *They* keep cool. You ever been to Flahrida?"

"Nope, never. What's it like?

"You know what it's like as well as I do. You see *The*

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Yearling? That picture with Jane Wyman? *Who*, by the way, I don't care atall for!"

"I'm not sure."

"She is the drabbest thing!—But Flahrida's just like that, beauty everywhere. O'course the people're diff'rent. The movies make 'em like a bunch of hillbillies. But they're really more like me nowadays. Just—ordinary."

Oh, thought Wesley, but *you*'re not ordinary. But he could not bring himself to say it.

"I'm so glad I had the nerve to come up here, Wesley. I was afraid you were mad at me the way I acted about Earl. This tea's s'good and it's the first time I've been comfy the whole day. Except—Wesley, I don't think I can stand this dress another minute. What if I' just slip it off and set here in m'slip?"

Wesley was not certain he had heard correctly. "You want to take your *dress* off?"

"M'petticoat covers everything important. We're both intelligent, aren't we?"

"What if—what if Earl should come up here? Or Mrs. Kromer? How would that look?"

"Mrs. Kromer wouldnt come up here!" She leaned forward and smiled. "What about Earl, honey? He's *blind!* Remember, like a bat!"

"Well, go ahead. If you'll be more comfortable."

"Thank Gawd!" Faye stood up and took hold of her dress by the skirt and pulled it over her head. Suddenly there was an emergency. "*Help!* I'm smotherin'! Wesley!"

Wesley stood up. "What d'you want *me* to do?"

"Help me, honey, please. M'head's caught."

Wesley unfastened the hook at the back of her neck and helped pull the dress over her head. Faye looked at him sheepishly with a false frown. "Claustrophobia," she said. "I'm always afraid I'll smother m' self t'death."

Wesley's embarrassment sent blood to his face. He went to the refrigerator to refill his glass. "Some more tea?" he said.

"No thanks, but I feel a thousand percent better."

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When they were seated once more, Faye said, "With some men I might feel naked like this, but with you not at all." Then she turned her eyes from him. "I guess I do like you pretty much, Wesley. I feel silly saying so, but..."

"But with me you feel you can," he said; the irony with which he had tried to color his voice did not effect her one whit. Wesley began to wonder how soon he could get her clothed and out the door. She leaned forward and placed her hand on his.

"I know men, Wes, and I can tell a kind one when he comes along. How many I ask you would let a person barge right in on their privacy like this? Not very damn many, honey, excuse my French but it's true."

"Oh, I don't know about that, Faye."

"Nope nope, you're wrong! A single girl, even though she may be a widow, learns an awful lot about life. O'course you did know I was a widow."

"Yes, I guess I did."

"Well it's not very easy, honey. Now let's talk about you."

He smiled. "I'm *not* a widow."

Faye laughed: "Of course you're not." Then she moved quickly to his side and mussed his hair with her fingers.

"Oh, you *are* fun, dammit all." And then she dropped her hand to his chin and drew his face to her breast. "Sweet, too."

Wesley took hold of her wrist firmly and pulled her hand from his face. With her arm still in his grip, he stood and faced her.

Faye said, "You *hurt* me! Whatever's wrong anyhow? Heavens, I was only foolin' around. Aren't we both intelligent?"

He released her arm and Faye held her hurt wrist tenderly in her free hand. Then, raising it to her face, she caressed it with her lips. As she looked up at Wesley, her brows knitted in mock pain, she said, "Goddam you, honey, you're *strong*."

"I sure didn't mean to hurt you, Faye."

"Oh, was that supposed to feel good?"

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"Why don't you put on your dress and we'll go sit on the front porch. Finish our cigarets, drink our tea."

Faye smiled at him. "If that's what you want more than anything else in the world—then that's just what we'll do. 'Cept I'm not putting on this dress, not for all o'Carter's little pills."

When they had reached the landing on the second floor, Faye turned to Wesley and held his arm for a moment. "I suppose it did seem to you I was actin' like a—you know, just dreadful, like some floozie. But I hope you know it's not—"

Wesley interrupted, "You mean you just felt that with me you could!"

Faye turned angrily and hurried down the hall. Wesley followed close behind, laughing gently. "Hey, you're not sore, are you? I was just trying to be funny."

Faye did not look at him when she answered. "You make a girl feel like about thirty cents. Honestly!"

Mrs. Kromer was asleep on the front porch but the slam of the screen door awakened her.

"Oh!" Faye said, "I thought you'd be in bed. We were just goin' to sit for a minute or two. You know, cool off, as if that was possible, Lord."

Mrs. Kromer eyed Faye curiously; her mouth fell open and her big jaw rested on her chest. "What's goin' on? What happened to you?"

"Nothin', why?" Faye said. Mrs. Kromer sat forward.

"W-w-where's your—your dress?"

"Oh, I was just up at Wesley's and it got so hot we'd like to screamed. So I took off m'dress."

Mrs. Kromer stared stupidly at Wesley. There was no judgement in her tone, only profound curiosity. "Just the two of you up there?" Wesley was not certain what she was thinking but the struck dumb look on her face amused him.

"Don't worry about it, Mrs. Kromer. Faye's safe with me."

Faye looked into his face for a moment, her eyes opened wide, and she said loudly: "Safe! Did you say *safe*?" And then she began to laugh. Wesley felt the blood rush to his face again as her laughter rose. Faye threw herself into the

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chair next to Mrs. Kromer. She turned to her and said, "Honey, did you hear what I heard?"

Mrs. Kromer was puzzled. "I think I did. Why?"

"Oh nothin', but it just struck me. Sit down, Wes."

But Wesley remained standing, his toes gripped firmly at the soles of his shoes as if he sought to plant himself more securely to the wooden planks of the porch floor. He looked at Faye and he saw her eyes glittering wildly into his face and now Mrs. Kromer was staring at him too.

"A girl couldn't be *safer*," Faye said. "She just couldn't!"

She began to laugh once more but this time there was hysteria in her tones. Wesley wanted to take hold of her throat and choke the voice from it but he stood there and listened while the whole world and even the darkness itself seemed to crack open and crumble under the hammering blows of these nightmare sounds.

5

There is an all-night coffee place on the corner of Green and Marengo across the street from the Queen City Bus Depot. It is a small white building set alone on the edge of a parking lot. Among the persons who stop here are bus and taxi drivers, workers on their way home from the swing shift at the aircraft factories, and people waiting for the bus to Hollywood.

When Earl Walker opened the door at midnight, the counterman shouted, "Hi pal! Sit down."

Earl smiled at the counterman and to the place itself. "Is that you, Stokes?"

"Yeah, it's me." Stokes' voice was deep and harsh. He was in his middle thirties and black hair grew thick on his chest and arms.

"Where'll I sit?" Earl said.

"Anywhere. The place is empty." Stokes came out from behind the counter and conducted Earl to the stool nearest the door. "The fan's broke down, but you might get a breeze here."

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Earl placed his cardboard box on the counter and hung his cane on the edge of it. After a moment he heard a dish touch the counter in front of him.

Stokes said, "Cream and sugar, right? And a glazed donut. Have I got a memory?"

Earl would have preferred milk but the coffee had been poured and he knew Stokes was sensitive.

"Doin' yourself any good, Earl?"

"I got some prospects. Did a fella named John ask for me tonight?"

"John? Nope, no Johns, pal."

Earl sipped the coffee but it was steaming hot and so he smoked and waited for it to cool. Some time later, after several customers had arrived, eaten and left again, he said, as if no time had elapsed at all: "Because I'm lookin' for him."

"What you say, Earl?"

"He's supposed to meet me here at midnight."

"Who's that, Earl? Who you talking about?"

"Fella named John." He extended his arm to Stokes. "My watch right, Stokes?"

"Yeah. Ten after one. Say, Earl, how come you wear a watch? I mean..."

Earl smiled. "No crystal on it and the numbers stick up. Braille."

"You know that's goddam clever," said Stokes. Then he waited on a lady who had come in, a nurse who wanted strong coffee to take out. When she had left, others came in and Stokes was busy for a while and then there was loud noise in the parking lot and six young boys, hot-rod drivers, came in for hamburgers and when they had left, Stokes said, "Earl, I don't think this John's gonna show. It's two-thirty. You got some important business with him?"

"Important to me," Earl said. "He took a billfold last night, said he was going to show his brother-in-law and bring it back tonight. Either that or pay me the six-fifty."

"Where'd you meet this creep?"

"In a bar on Fair Oaks Avenue."

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"Fair Oaks! What, some dive? And you never seen him before?"

"No, but I talked to him quite a bit."

"Well, buddy," Stokes said, "I think you been had."

Earl was silent for a moment. Then he said, "You don't mind me waiting here, do you, Stokes?"

"*Hell* no! Want some more coffee?"

Earl sat in this coffee place until morning but the man named John did not appear. At six-thirty, Earl stood and withdrew a change purse from his pocket. "Stokes?"

"Yeah?"

"How much?"

"Nothin'. You kept me company."

"I *want* to pay for it," Earl said.

"Naw, forget it."

"I don't want to forget it," he said firmly. Then, after a moment, he added quietly: "Why don't you let me owe you?'

"Why owe me?" Stokes said. "I'll never remember anyway. I got a memory like a pig. I can't even remember when I was born. Nineteen-nineteen, I think."

Earl spoke softly, "Anybody else here but us?"

"The place is empty. Why?"

"Look, Stokes," Earl said, "I'd rather owe you 'cause then when I come back again you won't think I'm a bum."

Stokes looked at Earl for a long time. Then, quietly,he said, "Okay, pal, you owe me."

Earl picked up his cardboard box and his cane and started for the door. Stokes reached it first and opened it. He took Earl's arm and said, "Buddy, listen a minute, will you? You shouldn't go around trusting people. Not these days." To emphasize the point he was about to make, he lifted his hand, and failing to realize the gesture would be lost on Earl, he pointed toward the ceiling with his middle finger. "They'll screw you every time."

Earl was silent for a long time and then he grinned. "Stokes, I just clipped you for seventy-five cents, didn't I?"

"*Me?* Hell no. You said you'd *owe* me!"

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Earl started out the door. "That's right. And John owes me. So long, Stokes."

For a long time, perhaps a year or more, Wesley Stuart had, before going to bed each night, covered his mirror by draping a towel over the door of his medicine chest. There was a reason for this: if he came to it newly awakened, faced it unprepared, his mirror held within it the power to spoil an entire day: some terrifying emptiness in the set of his mouth, a certain dark and hawklike hunger in his eyes, a total portrait of misery so profound that it at times caused him to weep, confronted him with such fascinating horror that he could seldom look away until it had damaged his spirit and left him weak with depression. Though he never thought of it in this way, it was the face of one who seemed destined to become a mystic but who had not yet found his god or his cult, in whom there was only the need and the hunger, the void itself, a great windowless temple inside where, while the body slept, demons flittled and played, sucking at the spirit. The alarm clock, the radio, breakfast, all of these were a part of the imperfect daily exorcism; but perhaps a more important part of this process had been Wesley's facility for repressing his memory of them when they persisted.

But at some time during this summer of heat and smog he had given up this practice of covering the mirror at night, for he found no further need to prepare in this way his daytime attitude. Now in the mornings when the alarm clock had awakened him, he turned on the radio and listened to music and when he had breakfasted and brushed his teeth, his dreams would be forgotten; the contact with his face was no longer an unpleasant experience, certainly no longer a frightening one, and he might even murmur tunelessly the words of some popular song as he shaved.

But on the morning following Faye's visit, he found his old face in the mirror; and though he did not realize it the summer happiness had ended. What remained was a series of events in which it would one day seem that reality had at some point merged with the world of his dreams.

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On this morning Wesley awakened more tired than he had been at midnight. It was as if, lying on that bed with his eyes closed, he had performed some exhausting labor against profound obstacles. His back ached and there was a feeling of strain in his face and in the muscles of his jaws. Wesley knew even before he reached the mirror just what he would find there and so he avoided it for a long time.

Last night for the first time he could remember a dream had begun even before he was asleep and he had had to turn the light on before it would stop. In an effort to tire himself he had wandered through the streets until midnight and when at last he felt ready for sleep and had gone to bed, the trouble began: he thought he had heard a sound in the kitchen alcove and when he opened his eyes to look he saw the figure of a naked woman seated at the table staring at him. Even though he knew she was not a real person the clarity of her image frightened him. He sat up in bed and discovered that the woman was his mother. But she was not as he had remembered her, a proud overdressed bridge club president in a state of continuous activity, always putting on her hat, taking it off, preening herself like some bird in flight preparation, forever giddy, busy, endlessly chattering; the woman in the kitchen looked like his mother but her image had the transparency of a motion picture ghost, she was naked and listless and sat staring at the bed with her finger poked into her own naval, scratching miserably. Her hair was a dry brown mass of lifeless wisps, and her face was bloodless and haggard, sad. There was no threat of violence in her presence but what made Wesley's fear grow almost to panic was the distinctness of her image, the exact reality of her every unreal aspect: in her pale eyes was the troubled look of one who is about to weep and in her posture was defeat, the distress of one on the brink of death.

In the morning as Wesley sat drinking his coffee, he remembered that he had turned on the light and found no one but himself in the room; but for some time the clock had ticked with a menacing beat and for hours he had lain on the bed straining after sleep. Now, while Wesley was remembering,

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Earl appeared at the door. Wesley looked at him for a long time. At this moment he saw, in Earl, the flaw in his own life: the open door and the figure of an outsider who might at any moment enter.

Remembering what his life had been before the summer, he regretted each change he had permitted to come about. Inhabited as it may have been by obscure secrets and certain twisted dreams, his former invulnerability had at least precluded the entrance of new uninvited persons. Now he thought of Earl's first arrival several weeks ago and of his own strange willingness to accept the blind man; how Earl had managed, it now seemed, to appear at Wesley's door at just the proper psychological moment to win an invitation to a meal until, within so short a time, his presence at meal time and at all times had become expected, had been taken for granted by both of them. He now attributed all of his unhappiness to this situation; and his own weakness in having permitted it to begin, and to persist, disgusted him.

Wesley vowed to himself to end this situation and to do it simply, quickly, without discussion. Earl had stood in the doorway for some minutes now and, watching him, Wesley remembered how, early in the summer, he had discovered that with Earl he could achieve solitude simply by remaining silent: perhaps this discovery would help him now.

When he had finished his coffee Wesley went to the door and though he had intended to say nothing, he paused and touched Earl's arm: "G'morning. There's coffee on the stove. I got to run. I'm late."

Whenever in his wandering he heard the hum—which to others is a roar—of an airplane overhead, Earl Walker's hands remembered their contact with the wooden wings and twirling tin propeller of a toy he'd owned in childhood. But this was no decent substitute for seeing a real one take off or land or for watching it in its flight through that place known as the sky. Earl wanted to see, to be a person fit to enjoy movies, a sunrise, the distinction between night and day and the meaning of pink and hazel and bright green; and to see

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faces, those of people he knew and even those of strangers.

But this desire was not often in the foreground of his mind, for he knew that yearning after the impossible could make a madman of one who might otherwise be sane; say then that, inside of him, there was a small child insane with yearning for what he remembered of pine trees and snow, but Earl himself was a man and his life was not inhabited by faces. The world he lived in was one of sound and texture, of voices and the temperature of hands. Sight was outside of him, a satellite of his world, and he yearned for it only as some child on a summer evening might stare covetously at the moon.

Earl had been taught in a school for the blind to perform for himself all of the tasks necessary to existence; he could identify by touch or smell many objects which most sighted people have first to see. And in his twenty years of blindness and deafness he had developed some keen inner eye which could tell him the quality of the moods of others. When there were tensions he knew it as surely as if he had seen a frown wrinkle a brow or a lip tremble in anxiety or rage.

When he entered Wesley's apartment at breakfast time he knew some change had come about. He stood in the doorway for several minutes but he could hear no sound from within, only distant suggestions of sounds that could as well have been tricks in his own head. Then suddenly he felt a hand on his arm and he heard Wesley's voice:

"G'morning," Wesley said curtly, "there's coffee on the stove, I got to run. I'm late." Then Wesley brushed past him and Earl could hear him on the stairs.

Earl went to the stove and touched the coffee pot. It was hot. He went to the table and examined the cup and saucer and the position of the chair. And now he knew that Wesley had been sitting at the table and had seen him standing in the doorway but for some reason he had not spoken or given any signal at all.

6

Mrs. Kromer knew that the discomfort of the summer, the barely endurable heat, the impure air, was actually a blessing

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in disguise; these conditions were highly conducive to her meditations. For when the body suffers, the spirit is all the more willing to free itself. Each afternoon, when she had eaten her lunch of raw or lightly cooked vegetables (heavy foods and greases have a way of pasting the spirit to the body), she closed the doors and windows of her small parlor and drew the windowshades. Then, in semi-darkness, lying on her old wicker chaise longue in the center of the room, she would close her eyes and concentrate on some imagined center of light.

In this way, through pictures that appeared in this imagined light, she believed her life was guided from above. On certain days—all too often in fact—she saw the face of the Chinaman whom, by divine plan or perhaps through some great cosmic mistake, she had never met. He lived with a concubine who had borne him eleven sons. He was a good man but he had found no happiness with this woman who was wrong for him in the first place and now, even though his skin was smooth and his hair as black as ever, Mrs. Kromer saw him as a very old man: his movements had become stiff and he had lost weight. Since all of his sons had left home to join the Communist army, he worked alone now and paused often in the fields to rest. The concubine, his woman, had grown fat and spent her days lolling about the house sucking on a piece of candied ginger. She offered him no comfort at all. Mrs. Kromer knew there was nothing she could do for him; both their present sojourns were nearly ended now and whenever his face appeared in her meditation, she would turn on the small lamp next to her chaise longue and read Mrs. Barneweller until her mind had become freed once again.

"The world," according to Anna Hope Barneweller, "is a proving ground for sainthood, which is the common destiny of mankind." She taught that each man is born many times and that the soul of a man is the soul of God. "Severed from its Father at the time of its first birth, this spiritual entity begins its sojourn of thousands of years through multiple lifetimes until it has learned to transmute the pain of living into divine joy. All the sufferings of the body through afflictions and illnesses, and of the spirit in its essential loneliness,

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is designed to draw the soul of a man nearer and nearer to the end of its period of separation and darkness, closer and closer to God; and finally, having attained this purity through that final and joyful crucifixion to which each of us is destined, the entity once again rejoins the Soul of its Father in Heaven."

Now Mrs. Kromer knew a good deal about the entities who inhabited her building, especially those on the fourth floor. She had known the day Earl Walker arrived that he had been sent to teach Wesley Stuart a lesson. There had at that time been a vacancy in the second floor rear but Mrs. Kromer had chosen to assign him to the room that was likely to do the most good both for him and for Mr. Stuart. A blind man who could hardly even hear, one who had to go into the streets to sell leathergoods, was a poor financial risk, Mrs. Kromer knew this, but she also knew that Christ, penniless as he was, would have been a certain sight poorer one. Would anyone in her right mind refuse to rent *Him* a room?

Events at first had gone along according to her expectations: Earl was taking his meals with Mr. Stuart and so far as she knew he wasn't paying anything for them. That was fine. All that money Mr. Stuart was making over in Hollywood had certainly done nobody's soul any good, not while it was sitting there stacked and glittering in some musty old bank vault.

This much, thanks be, had been simple: the blind man's food problem had been solved without any meditations at all. But this week, the third in a row, he had not paid his rent. Mrs. Kromer, lying with her eyes closed in the afternoon darkness, had been guided to silence in this issue. Then, last night, just as she had foreseen, Earl Walker had come to her of his own mind and explained that there were certain outstanding moneys owed him and he would be grateful for her patience in waiting for these to be paid up so that he in turn could cover his debt to her.

Now, the next day, Mrs. Kromer's mind had been burdened all morning long with the inhabitants of the fourth floor and by noon her stomach was so upset she had to refrain from eating any lunch at all. That little room of Earl's had gone

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unrented for a long time and she could manage well enough without the revenue from it, but the idea of Mr. Stuart just across the hall, his pockets as full as a handicapped race horse, weighing down the progress of his soul, disturbed her so seriously that one bite from a stalk of celery brought on a fearful attack of nausea and she had to spit it out at the garbage pail.

Instead of eating lunch, Mrs. Kromer turned out the lights and closed the doors to her parlor. But the windowshade offered resistance: each time she drew it the blind snapped from her fingers, shot upward and, turning round and round at the top, flapped against the windowpane. Finally, standing barefoot on the sill, she flung a chenille bedspread over the curtain rod and, in a frenzy of urgency, hurried to the chaise longue.

She waited several minutes for her heart to stop pounding but even before her eyes were closed the light appeared like a tiny sun and, after a moment or two, her course was set.

That evening Wesley, who had decided that a few days withdrawal from his problems would bring about the best solution to them, went for a long drive in the San Fernando Valley and took his dinner alone at a quiet little roadhouse where soft delicate sounds were piped in from some unseen piano. This was his first dinner alone since the summer had begun; it was pleasant and he ate slowly.

Later, when he arrived at his apartment, Earl was nowhere in sight and it was evident that the blind man had not been here during the day, not even for lunch. Wesley was please with this progress he had made in readjusting his life.

He closed the door and sat down to inspect the contents of an envelope that had been addressed to him in Mrs. Kromer's handwriting and shoved under his door.

"Dear Mr. Stuart,

It has been my meaning to catch you in the halls for a good while now to thank you for something principally your kindness to Mister Walker whose eyes the Lord has seen fit to seal as well as his left ear and part of the right one.

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This food he gets from you is a blessing and there is only left one problem to devil him. He frets to me about the rent bill in the amount of twenty four dollars and such a shame for a piddling little bit of filthy lucre but I tell him dont fret son as the Lord is a tender shepherd and will find a way just as he found a way to feed you. God bless you from your friend and confident.

Miranda Kromer

P. S. I hope your nightmares are no longer so bad but when they act up be sure I will welcome to interprate again at any time."

Wesley was irritated but only for a moment. The artlessness of the note amused him. He wondered how long Mrs. Kromer must have labored to achieve even this degree of subtlety. He imagined her in her parlor on the first floor, pacing back and forth in a beltless housedress, a stub of a pencil in one hand, a fly swatter in the other, straightening a throw-rug with her big knuckled foot, planning, calculating the effect of her words; and how, finally, her huge and wild eyes ablaze with inspiration, she had leaned over the kitchen table and begun; then, after a dozen or more false starts, while the perspiration gleamed on her forehead, she had discarded one version after another until at last, in one fine masterful stroke, she had come upon this final one that would surely produce the perfect result.

For three days Wesley did not encounter the blind man anywhere but he thought of him often and wondered where he was taking his meals. These thoughts disturbed him but he knew that sooner or later he would forget about Earl; it took time to repair the damage caused by certain errors, lapses in strength, and he went about his living and doing, alone as before, waiting patiently for the return of his contentedness. He busied himself with his car, cleaning and washing it, making minor repairs, taking long drives into the mountains and through the valleys; and with going to movies and discovering new and interesting places to eat. He did not enjoy his solitude anymore, but he was certain that within

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a short time he would regain the sense of delight he had once felt in the company of himself. He planned to leave from work on Friday and spend a weekend in San Francisco; new surroundings would command his attention.

Wesley left the television station at four o'clock on Friday. He walked several blocks to the place where his car was parked. It was a strong powerful car with grillwork and headlights like the snout and eyes of some long-extinct monster. Wesley brushed from its fender a piece of newspaper that had come to rest there; his movement was like a caress. He rolled back the canvas top and started the motor, racing it for a few seconds with his foot.

Soon he and the car were on Sunset Boulevard headed toward the Ocean. He drove for a long time and soon the Ocean was on his left and then he turned on the radio, volume high, and let this jazz music blare out against the sounds of the sea. For a while the palisades were on his right and then he came to Malibu and slowed down, perhaps to stop; he was hungry but he did not feel like eating. He drove for another longer time until the sun had set and his hunger no longer bothered him and soon it was as if he had become a part of the car, its motor and the jazz. His thoughts were not those of a person but of things, machines and oceans, rhythms, and all their noises were a part of him so that the time and the space he covered were like nothing and ceased to exist or to have meanings. He drove for a long time.

Now the headlights illuminated briefly some white object, a cat, a rabbit, a bird—there was no telling, it happened too quickly. As it connected with the bumper there was a quick soft thump and Wesley began to tremble; his thinking had begun again and he had no control over it. In his mind the white object crushed against the car took shape again until it grew and had become a person; and Wesley was terrified by a sudden wondering whether this drive tonight were not a drive to death.—But the obvious absurdity of the notion comforted him. He realized that his own irrational guilt at having deserted a man who might be hungry—irrational because he could in no way be responsible to a stranger—had

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conspired against him just as Mrs. Kromer and Earl himself had done.

He stopped at a filling station and turned off the motor. The radio stopped playing at the same instant and this new silence was as lovely as the noise had once been: a silence composed of softer rhythms, more distant sounds, the sea, his voice and the voice of the station attendant. He walked around to the front of the car to examine the bumper and found it splattered with blood. Dark red spots had dried on the metal strips of the grill.

Wesley asked for the rest-room and he was directed to a small white room where there were a sink, a toilet and a mirror with the word SANITARY in red cellophane letters glued over its surface.

He looked into the mirror and found his morning face: the red-rimmed empty eyes reflecting the hunger of a man much older, the wasted despair of some ancient prospector who had spent his life in search of gold on a desert where there was nothing but sand. The night wind and earlier the sun had dried his skin and now in the mirror he could see certain lines that had never been there before. His lips seemed separate from the rest of him, as if large frozen berries had been stuck into the face of a corpse. Wesley felt a nausea come upon him which he believed had resulted from his long abstinence from food. He leaned over the toilet and stuck his finger into his throat but nothing came out but air, a deep prolonged belch that brought with it an absurd echo as if the sound had been produced from the depths of some great empty cavern.

Instead of continuing northward he returned to Pasadena. It was long past midnight when he arrived. He sat at the table and wrote a check for twenty-four dollars and then he wrote a brief note to Mrs. Kromer in which he said he liked being left alone and would appreciate her cooperation in seeing to it that no one annoyed him with gratitude. When he had placed the envelope under her door, he climbed the stairs once more and, leaving the door to his apartment open several inches to permit the entrance of air from the hallway, he went to bed. Within a moment or two, Wesley was asleep.

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7

People in the San Gabriel Valley do not as a rule pray for rain to relieve the summer heat; they pray for a certain wind from the Pacific to find its way in through the barriers of mountains all around. On this night, in the August of this summer, such a wind arrived and the next morning the sky was blue, the rays of the sun were gentle rays, and in Pasadena you could see people working in their gardens pruning rose-trees or picking those plums that had not gone rotten on the branches. There was a midsummer renewal of life as if some lovely freak spring had taken place on a desert.

Wesley awakened to the smell of coffee and to the sounds of the percolator. The windowshades were still drawn but when he opened his eyes he saw a shadow moving about in the kitchen. But because he knew who it was, Wesley was not alarmed.

The good nightwind had had the effect of a stimulating drug breathed into the valley's air by some great wizard: the season's stillness gave place to activity. Mrs. Kromer put on a pair of bright blue anklesox and stepped into her shoes—gentlemen's sport shoes with crêpe soles—and walked over to Marengo Avenue where for the first time in many weeks she did her own marketing. Wesley Stuart drove his car into the driveway and with a cool stream of water from a long black garden hose he washed his car in the shadow of the house. Miss Faye Zelger returned laden with parcels from a dimestore shopping spree at about eleven a.m. She stopped for a moment in the driveway to comment on the loveliness of the weather and Wesley was struck so by the new sobriety of her manner, a quality of almost genuine sweetness, that he decided to give her a civil answer. Then Faye walked away singing, using lalala instead of words, into the house. Wesley covered the car with some white liquid mud from a bottle and then with cheesecloth he set about removing it, polishing vigorously until soon the car shone like a black mirror and he parked it once again on the street.

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Now Mrs. Kromer and Earl Walker appeared at the corner, walking toward the house. Under her left arm she carried a carton of fresh vegetables and her right arm was looped through Earl's. She walked with difficulty as if there were hot coals underfoot, for even in these oversized gentleman's shoes, her huge old feet yearned for freedom. Earl carried a large bunch of gladioli given him by an overstocked florist on Green Street.

Some minutes later Wesley and Earl climbed into the shining car and drove to the beach. Mrs. Kromer took the flowers into her kitchen and when she had arranged in three glass milkbottles, each with the words 3 cents DEPOSIT stamped in orange on the sides, she kicked off her shoes and delivered two of the bouquets—one to Faye across the hall and the second to Wesley's kitchen table on the fourth floor.

Wesley and Earl returned from the beach late in the afternoon. They stopped at a supermarket where Wesley purchased two large bagfuls of groceries and later, with appetites sharpened by the good sea air and a long afternoon of walking on the drenched sand at the Ocean's edge, these two men sat down to a meal of broiled beef that was black on the outside and red in the middle, broccoli, dark bread, strawberries and milk, and when they had drunk some coffee and smoked a couple of cigarets, Earl said he had places to go and things to do later in the evening. Wesley believed this activity had something to do with the earning of the blind man's livelihood and even though at some point in the last twenty-four hours he had decided to continue his association with Earl, it was not his intention to discourage any man's efforts to gain his independence.

When Earl had left the house Wesley cleaned his apartment, a job which had been neglected for several days, and after he had taken a warm bath and then a cool one, he lay on his bed contented, pleased that the strangeness had once again ascended from the world, had retreated to those unknown areas of the sky where, with all the other demons Mrs. Kromer spoke of, those that really did seem to stalk about the earth causing disease in a man's peace, truly belonged.

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Though he was relaxed and there was peace inside of him now for the first time in days, he did not yet feel ready for sleep; and so he searched about for something to read and came upon a volume that had been given to him a long time ago. It was called *A Primer For Sainthood*, and its author was Mrs. Anna Hope Barneweller. He thought, with sympathy now, of Mrs. Kromer, and as he sat on the bed, smiling, he turned back the cover of the book.

One afternoon in early September Mrs. Kromer stopped Earl Walker on the stairs and told him that if he would kindly step into her parlor she would conduct some important business with him.

When they were seated, she said, "What color's the sky today, young fella?" Earl said he thought it was probably blue and Mrs. Kromer told him he was exactly correct and in case he wondered, blue was the color of a cool glass of water splashed in your face on a hot day. Then she said, "Earl I am privileged to tell you some good news. You have got a secret benefactor interested in your welfare."

Earl sat forward in his chair. "A secret what?"

"Benefactor, honey. A benefactor is a good person that likes to help out."

"Who?"

"That's what's secret. I have no liberty to tell."

She brought out a pad of paper and a pencil and sat down, facing him. "All you got to do is give me a list of what money you owe various folks and I take it to this secret person."

Earl thought for a moment. "And I won't even know who it is, ever?"

"It's God, mister, that's all you got to know. Everything good comes from God. That blue sky, the cool water, the whole works. Now let's tend to business."

Earl Walker and Mrs. Kromer sat at that table for a long time, thinking, figuring, scratching out certain items—she thought the seventy-five cents to Mr. Stokes at the coffee place was not big enough to trouble over—and replacing

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them with others, discussing this sudden good fortune; and when Mrs. Kromer totaled the figures they came to more than three hundred dollars. Earl wondered if this benefactor could afford all that and Mrs. Kromer reassurred him.

"Earl," she said, "I want to remind you that God's source of supply stretches from here to Hongkong and then it keeps on goin'."

"I was wondering, " Earl said, "if I could put down a debt I haven't got yet. One I'll have in about a week."

"Anything at all," Mrs. Kromer said, "anything to help lighten the burden from your darkness. How much?"

"A hundred and eight dollars."

Mrs. Kromer added that to the rest. "That's a fancy figure, brother," she said. "You fixin' to buy a house?"

Earl smiled with happiness and his eyes were as bright as if the pictures in them contained all the beautiful colors and shapes in the world.

"Nope. No house," he said.

That evening, after dinner on the fourth floor, something happened which in itself is a natural thing to happen but which to Wesley, later in his life when he would think about it, was *strange, unforgettable.*

Earl suddenly asked him what he looked like.

"Oh, just uh—you know, like anybody else, Earl."

Earl had embarrassed himself but his curiosity forced him to pursue the question. "You can't look like *any*body else."

"You'd be surprised. I'm just as average as a... Well, I'm sorry, Earl, I guess I don't know how to describe myself."

"Mrs. Kromer told me you were about my height and she said you had gold hair. Do you?"

"Sometimes it looks gold, but it's just blonde."

Earl laughed a forced laugh that was intended to relieve his discomfiture but only succeeded in increasing it. "I thought only girls had blonde hair." He was quiet for a moment and then, with sudden decision, he said, "Wesley, I'm going to ask you something and you tell me yes or no and then forget it. Okay?"

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"Okay."

"There's only one way I know how somebody looks and that's if I touch his face. D'you mind?"

After a moment, Wesley reached across the small table; he took Earl's hand and, leaning forward, he guided this hand to his face. For a brief moment this smooth open palm rested against his cheek and then suddenly the fingers, infinitely gentle, began quickly to explore his face, stopping now and again as if to memorize what they had found. Wesley thought he had never experienced such profound tenderness, and because he was trembling, he gripped the table firmly to prevent Earl from detecting his emotion. Wesley had learned to find in the movement of Earl's hands all that might be found in the eyes of a person with sight; and now when Earl's hand hesitated for a moment he knew that during this pause some knowledge was being registered in the blind man's brain.

Earl's touch lingered for a moment at the corner of Wesley's eye and then he took his hand from Wesley's face and quickly rubbed the forefinger against the thumb, causing a tear to evaporate on the skin. Then Earl took hold of a bunch of Welsey's hair and gently pulled it. "You got a good face," he said.

Earl removed the napkin from his lap, rose from the table, excused himself and left the room. Wesley walked over to the door and closed it. Then he lay down on the bed and dropped a soft white pillow onto his face.

8

Though September was a hot month the winds had driven the smog away and one could enjoy once again the outdoors, breathe good air and observe in comfort the progress of late summer flowers. The sun, now a warming and illuminating thing, decorating the valley in light and shadow, had ceased to create a glare.

For several days Wesley saw Earl only at mealtime. Earl said he had hit a streak of luck in the sale of his leathergoods

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and each day after dinner he left with unusual abruptness and Wesley spent the evenings alone. But he looked forward to the weekends when he and Earl often took long drives into the mountains and to the beach. On these trips Wesley would often describe their surroundings and sometimes they would get out of the car and walk for a long time and eat a packed lunch in the open country. As the week grew to a close Wesley's anticipation grew and he marked time like a child waiting for Christmas.

One Friday night he had a dream: he and Earl Walker were on the lawn in front of Mrs. Kromer's house and they were building an airplane. In this dream Earl was no longer blind and he took an active part in the construction. Now this dream-plane was like none that has ever been seen: it had two fuselages crossed in the middle, and no wings at all, only these two crossed bodies forming a great letter X, and two propellers, one facing east and the other south. Wesley, dreaming, saw himself and Earl climb into the cockpit. The plane began to climb, straight up like a helicopter, and when it had risen higher than the house, this strange aircraft went into a nosedive and crashed on the lawn. Wesley saw Earl climb unharmed from the plane; but he himself was slumped dead in the cockpit. Mrs. Kromer hurried down the porch steps and laid her hand on Wesley's shoulder, and in a voice of command she said, "*Those who are dead will come to life.*" Then, obediently, he arose.

That was the end of the dream. But even after he had awakened Wesley could hear these words echoing in him. He remembered each detail of the dream and turned them over and over in his mind. Even though their meanings were not entirely clear the dream itself seemed to prophesy some new life, perhaps one which had already begun.

His thoughts turned to the room across the hall, that eternally dark place in which sound itself was seldom more than the humm and rhythm of distant things and in which there were no colors but imagined ones, no shapes but those that could be remembered in the fingertips; and he imagined that if people really did have souls as Mrs. Barneweller's book

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indicated—and they certainly must, because she had *proven*, it seemed to him now, that dreams themselves were some fragment of the soul's activity—then Earl must surely have a simple and beautiful one, contained as it was within the tranquil shell of his dark and silent life where peace, like geometry, must reign even in sleep.

He lay for a long time reviewing these quiet and golden thoughts and then drifted again into sleep. When he awakened the sun was shining through the drawn curtains. Suddenly he realized that today was Saturday. He dressed quickly, brushed his teeth, and lighted a fire under the tea kettle. He drew back the curtains and let the sun come in and then he opened the door so that Earl would know he was awake.

By nine o'clock he had shaved, swept the floors, and prepared breakfast. Anxious to begin the weekend, he crossed the hall and knocked on Earl's door. There was no response and he knocked again, this time with his fist. At last he heard a stirring from within. Satisfied that Earl had awakened, he turned to leave. But just as he stepped inside his own room, he heard a door open and a voice speaking to him in a whisper.

"D'you knock on our door, Wesley?"

Still half asleep, her body partly covered by a green kimono held imperfectly together by one hand at the waist, Faye Zelger stood at Earl Walker's door. A patch of nakedness showed under the torn armpit of her gown and the pink nipple of one tiny breast was exposed. With her free hand she rubbed sleep from an eye and pushed a long lock of hair from her face; then, hushing him with a gesture, she closed Earl's door behind her and, to Wesley, she said, "What you want, dear?"

Wesley stared at her incredulously as she moved toward him in the hall.

"You boys have some date or other? We got t'bed s'late, I just thought t'hell with the alarm clock. An' we've got this fearful trip ahead of us." Wesley's lips were parted and he continued to stare at her. "Well," she continued, "don't

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look s'stupid, honey. Didn't you *know?* We'uns 're goin' t'Flahrida t'night."

Her dialect seemed to Wesley even broader than before, and her manner stung him almost as sharply as the knowledge it conveyed. He tied to speak but it took a moment to form the word, "Tonight?"

Faye flung her hands into the air like a mimic acting out the word hopeless. "Lawurd, he hasn't told you a thang! He just *despises* conversation. But all sorts o'things bin happenin', Wesley. Mamma's bin beggin' me t'come home and promises to b'have herself. I wrote her the whole shebang—eyes, hearing aid, ever'thang. But Mamma says 'Bring 'im on ahead.' I think she's lonesome. Anyhow we're takin' the eleven-oh-two."

Faye folded her arms over her breasts and took a step forward; then, looking directly and, it seemed to him, with a certain calculated boldness into his eyes, she said, "Wesley, there's one part absolutely secret and I know you're not the kind t'tell, so listen." She blinked her eyes and licked the morning dryness from her lips. "Our bus tickets," she said, "were taken care of by a secret *benefactor.*"

Perhaps if Faye had turned away, what followed might never have happened. But she continued to look into Wesley's eyes.

Wesley's open palm shot forward and lifted the girl into the air. She landed with a hard smack on the floor and screamed. Then, bending over her, he filled his left hand with her and beat her across the face several times with his open palm. Faye's voice was now trapped inside of her and she was no longer able to scream.

Wesley stood back and looked at Faye as she huddled close to the floor, fixed there by fear, holding her face in her hands. Blood appeared between her fingers and mingled with her hair. Then the door opened and Earl, calm smiling in his ignorance, stood there naked with his head cocked to one side trying to listen. He held out his hand and said, "Hey, where *is* everybody?"

Now Faye scrambled over to him on the floor and threw

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her arms about his legs and a sudden deep frown creased Earl's face and his sightless toy-doll eyes opened wide: "Faye?" He touched the top of her head with his fingertips. Faye began at that moment to sob hysterically and Wesley saw some insane dream image of himself on the floor in a bloody green kimono clinging to the blind man's ankles. He turned quickly to his own door and closed it behind him.

There was a click of a key turning in his lock.

Summoned by a third floor tenant, Mrs. Kromer appeared, breathless, her heart pounding hard inside of her. Faye tried to tell her what had happened but she had lost some of her powers of articulation: "He's lost his mind, he's lost his mind!" Faye repeated this over and over again and Mrs. Kromer guided these two people to her parlor on the first floor and after she had bathed Faye's swollen and still swelling face and told Earl not to worry, she ran barefooted all the way to the top of the house, not even hearing the questions hurled at her by tenants along the way and ignoring completely a warning that a woman her age should not run up and down the stairs like a twelve-year-old. She knocked on Wesley's door. She knocked for a long time but there was no response.

"Mr. Stuart?" she called softly. "Mr. Stuart? Can you hear me?" She paid no attention to a long sharp pain that began somewhere in her chest and travelled through her left arm and into her head; because almost as soon as it began, the pain ceased, and whole parts of her became numb. With her ear pressed against the keyhole she listened for another moment but there was no sign of life within. Then, her own vertigo mounting with each word, she spoke softly into that keyhole: "Mr. Stuart?" she said. "Can you still hear me? Can you still hear my voice?"

Half an hour later in front of Wesley's door where several of the tenants had assembled, it was generally believed that their landlady had known, had had sufficient warning that death was near, and had taken the time to arrange herself comfortably on the floor. One bare foot pointed west and the other east. Her face had turned blue but she was smiling

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an eyeless openmouthed greeting to the sun that now streamed through the skylight.

Inside the locked door, Wesley lay on the bed with his eyes closed. Of the sounds that reached him, only these had meaning: dead died passed away pour soul—and, appropriately, he placed his left hand over his heart and crossed it with his right.

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TWO POEMS BY THOM GUNN

ST MARTIN AND THE BEGGAR

Martin sat young upon his bed
A budding cenobite,
Said 'Though I hold the principles
Of Christian life be right,
I cannot grow from them alone
I must go out to fight.'

He travelled hard, he travelled far,
The light began to fail.
'Is not this act of mine,' he said,
'A cowardly betrayal,
Should I not peg my nature down
With a religious nail?'

Wind scudded on the marshland
And clanking at his side
The sword soon clattered under hail:
What could he do but ride?—
There was not shelter for a dog,
The garrison far ahead.

A ship that moves on darkness
He rode across the plain,
When a brawny beggar started up
Who pulled at his rein
And leant dripping with sweat and water
Upon the horse's mane.

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He glared into Martin's eyes
Wild rather than bold,
His hair sent rivers down his spine,
Like a fowl plucked to be sold
His flesh was grey. Martin said—
'What, naked in this cold?

'I have no food to give you,
Money would be a joke.'
Pulling his new sword from the sheath
He took his soldier's cloak
And cut it into two equal parts
With a single stroke

Grabbing one to his shoulders,
Pinning it with his chin,
The beggar dived into the dark,
And soaking to the skin
Martin went on slowly
Until he reached an inn.

One candle on the wooden table,
The food and drink were poor,
The woman hobbled off, he ate,
Then casually before
The table stood the beggar as
If he had used the door.

Now dry for hair and flesh had been
By warm airs fanned,
Still bare but round each muscled thigh
A single golden band;
His eyes now wild with love, he held
The half cloak in his hand.

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'You recognised the human need
Included yours, because
You did not hesitate, my saint,
To cut your cloak across,
And never since that moment
Did you regret the loss.

'My enemies would have turned away,
My holy toadies would
Have given all the cloak and frozen
Conscious they were good.
But you, being a saint of men
Gave only what you could.'

St Martin stretched his hand out
To offer from his plate,
But the beggar vanished, thinking food
Like cloaks is needless weight.
Pondering on this matter,
St Martin bent and ate.

BEFORE THE CARNIVAL

A painting by Carl Timner

Look, in the attic, the unentered room,
A naked boy leans on the outspread knees
Of his tall brother lolling in costume,
Tights, vest, and cap, of one who on trapeze
Finds comfort farthest from complacencies.

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Behind the little boy and acrobat
Through circling half-light from their down-shed musing
Hurries the miser in his double hat;
The dry guitar he holds is still, abusing
All others who play music of their choosing.

And lit by a sudden artificial beam
A smocked pretender with his instrument,
Knowing that he is fragment of a dream,
Smirks none the less with borrowed merriment
And twangs for approbation from the front.

Why should they listen when he sings about
The joy of others that he cannot share?
A sexual gossip with a doll-like pout
He cannot touch the objects of his stare:
A prodigal's reflections swimming there.

The boy, his brother's hand upon his arm,
Sees neither where the lava flow of chance
Overtook habit, for he feels the palm
Of him, whose turning muscle's nonchalance
Transforms to clockwork their prepared advance.

He too must pick an instrument at length
For this is painted during carnival:
Shall it be then a simple rung of strength
Or these with many strings where well-trained skill
May touch one while it keeps the others still?

And both must dress for the trooping, but the man
Is yet too active and the boy too young
For cloak or fur of heavy thought. They scan
The pace of silence, by the dancers shown
Robes of bright scarlet, horns that were never blown.

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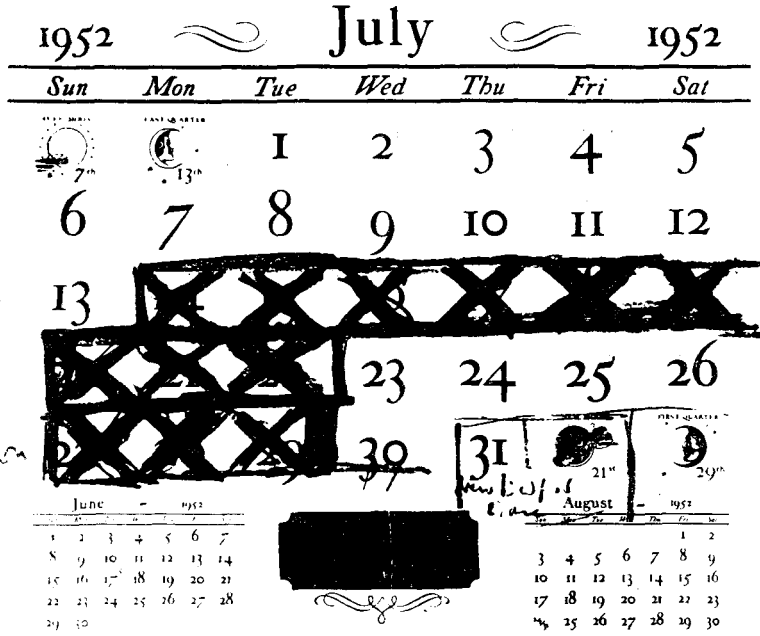

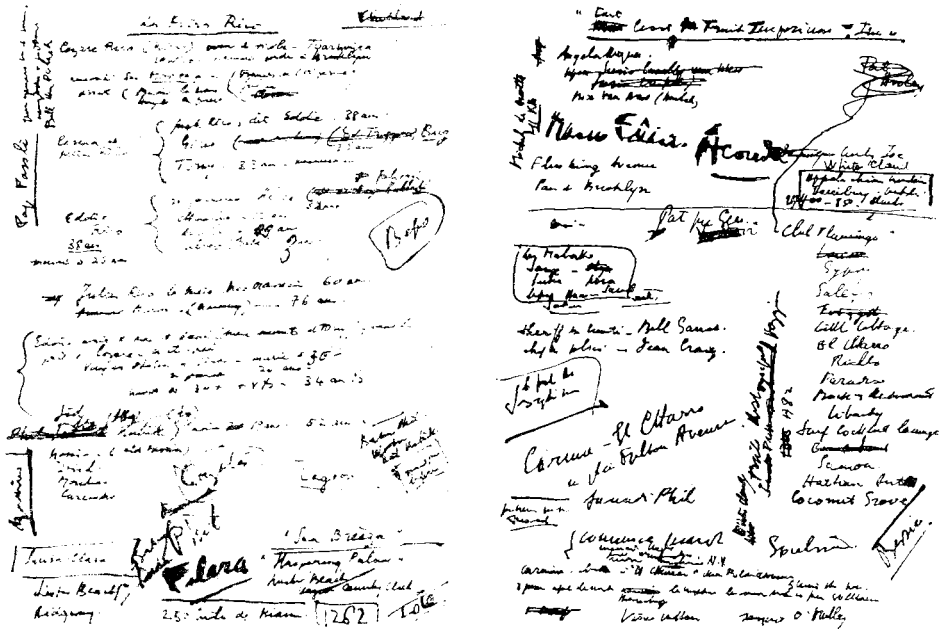

At top, the 11 × 16 *inch calendar sheet on which Simenon marked off in black each day of his writing* The Brothers Rico, *one chapter a day, and in red the three days spent revising it. At bottom, the two sides of a* 7 × 10 *brown manila envelope on which Simenon began consciously shaping the characters of* The Brothers Rico *two days before he began the novel on July* 14, 1952.

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THE ART OF FICTION IX

GEORGES SIMENON

André Gide, who was writing a study of Georges Simenon's fiction at the end of his life, called Simenon "perhaps the greatest novelist" of contemporary France.

Simenon published his first novel, *Au Pont des Arches*, at seventeen, and by writing it in ten days began at once his phenomenal practice of rapid production. Using at least sixteen pen-names ranging from Christian Brulls to Gom Gut, he began writing scores of commercial novels—one of them in exactly twenty-five hours—with the intention of training himself for more serious works. He shortened the period of training in commercial novels when he began to write a transitional fiction—his series of books about the detective Maigret. From the Maigrets he moved on rapidly to the tense psychological novel of less than two hundred pages—known to his thousands of European readers as "a simenon"—and of which he has now written more than seventy-five.

Today, except for an infrequent Maigret, he publishes only serious novels. These books, which he writes in French, are not only translated widely but continually used for movies and television—in adaptations which Simenon does not supervise, for dramas which he does not see.

Among his novels currently available in English translation

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are *The Heart of a Man, The Snow Was Black, Four Days in a Lifetime, I Take this Woman, The Girl in His Past, The Brothers Rico,* and most recently, in a combined volume, *The Magician* and *The Widow.*

Simenon was born in Belgium in 1903, spent much of his life in France, and came to live in the United States ten years ago.

SCENE:

Mr. Simenon's study in his rambling white house on the edge of Lakeville, Connecticut, after lunch on a January day of bright sun. The room reflects its owner: cheerful, efficient, hospitable, controlled. On its walls are the books of law and medicine, about which he is an expert; the telephone directories from many parts of the world to which he turns in naming his characters; the map of a town where he has just set his forty-ninth Maigret novel; and the calendar on which he has X-ed out in heavy crayon the days spent writing the Maigret—one day to a chapter—and the three days spent revising it—a labor which he has generously interrupted for this interview.

In the adjoining office, having seen that everything is arranged comfortably for her husband and the interviewer, Mrs. Simenon returns her attention to the business affairs of a writer whose novels appear six a year and whose contracts for books, adaptations, and translations are in more than twenty languages.

With great courtesy and in a rich voice which gives to his statements nuances of meaning much beyond the ordinary range, Mr. Simenon continues a discussion begun in the dining room.

* * *

Just one piece of general advice from a writer has been very useful to me. It was from Colette. I was writing short stories for *Le Matin,* and Colette was literary editor at that time. I remember I gave her two short stories and she returned them and I tried again and tried again. Finally she said, "Look, it is too literary, always too literary." So I followed her advice. It's what I do when I write, the main job when I rewrite.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean by "too literary"? What do you cut out, certain kinds of words?

SIMENON

Adjectives, adverbs, and every word which is there just to make an effect. Every sentence which is there just for the sentence. You know, you have a beautiful sentence—cut it. Every time I find such a thing in one of my novels it is to be cut.

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INTERVIEWER

Is that the nature of most of your revision?

SIMENON

Almost all of it.

INTERVIEWER

It's not revising the plot pattern?

SIMENON

Oh, I never touch anything of that kind. Sometimes I've changed the names while writing: a woman will be Helen in the first chapter and Charlotte in the second, you know; so in revising I straighten this out. And then, cut, cut, cut.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anything else you can say to beginning writers?

SIMENON

Writing is considered a profession, and I don't think it is a profession. I think that everyone who does not *need* to be a writer, who thinks he can do something else, ought to do something else. Writing is not a profession but a vocation of unhappiness. I don't think an artist can ever be happy.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

SIMENON

Because, first, I think that if a man has the urge to be an artist, it is because he needs to find himself. Every writer tries to find himself through his characters, through all his writing.

INTERVIEWER

He is writing for himself?

SIMENON

Yes. Certainly.

INTERVIEWER

Are you conscious there will be readers of the novel?

SIMENON

I know that there are many men who have more or less

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with more or less intensity the same problems I have and who will be happy to read the book to find the answer—if the answer can possibly be found.

INTERVIEWER

Even when the author can't find the answer do the readers profit because the author is meaningfully fumbling for it?

SIMENON

That's it. Certainly. I don't remember whether I have ever spoken to you about the feeling I have had for several years. Because society today is without a very strong religion, without a firm hierarchy of social classes, and people are afraid of the big organization in which they are just a little part, for them reading certain novels is a little like looking through the key-hole to know what the neighbor is doing and thinking—does he have the same inferiority complex, the same vices, the same temptations? This is what they are looking for in the work of art. I think many more people today are insecure and are in a search for themselves.

There are now so few literary works of the kind Anatole France wrote, for example, you know—very quiet and elegant and reassuring. On the contrary, what people today want are the most complex books, trying to go into every corner of human nature. Do you understand what I mean?

INTERVIEWER

I think so. You mean this is not just because today we think we know more about psychology but because more readers need this kind of fiction?

SIMENON

Yes. An ordinary man fifty years ago—there are many problems today which he did not know. Fifty years ago he had the answers. He doesn't have them any more.

INTERVIEWER

A year or so ago you and I heard a critic ask that the novel today return to the kind of novel which was written in the nineteenth century.

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SIMENON

It is impossible, completely impossible, I think. [*Pausing*] Because we live in a time when writers do not always have barriers around them, they can try to present characters by the most complete, the most full expression. You may show love in a very nice story, the first ten months of two lovers, as in the literature of a long time ago. Then you have a second kind of story: they begin to be bored; that was the literature of the end of the last century. And then, if you are free to go further, the man is fifty and tries to have another life, the woman gets jealous, and you have children mixed in it; that is the third story. We are the third story now. We don't stop when they marry, we don't stop when they begin to be bored, we go to the end.

INTERVIEWER

In this connection, I often hear people ask about the violence in modern fiction. I'm all for it, but I'd like to ask why you write of it.

SIMENON

We are accustomed to see people driven to their limit.

INTERVIEWER

And violence is associated with this?

SIMENON

More or less. [*Pausing*] We no longer think of a man from the point of view of some philosophers; for a long time man was always observed from the point of view there was a god and man was the king of creation. We don't think any more that man is the king of creation. We see man almost face to face. Some readers still would like to read very reassuring novels, novels which give them a comforting view of humanity. It can't be done.

INTERVIEWER

Then if the readers interest you it is because they want a novel to probe their troubles? Your role is to look into yourself and—

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SIMENON

That's it. But it's not only a question of the artist's looking into himself but also of looking into others with the experience he has of himself. He writes with sympathy because he feels that the other man is like him.

INTERVIEWER

If there were no readers you would still write?

SIMENON

Certainly. When I began to write I didn't have the idea my books would sell. More exactly, when I began to write I did commercial pieces, stories for magazines and things of that kind—to earn my living, but I didn't call it writing. But for myself, every evening, I did some writing without any idea that it would ever be published.

INTERVIEWER

You probably have had as much experience as anybody in the world in doing what you have just called commercial writing. What is the difference between it and non-commercial?

SIMENON

I call "commercial" every work, not only in literature but in music and painting and sculpture—any art—which is done for such-and-such a public or for a certain kind of publication or for a particular collection. Of course, in commercial writing there are different grades. You may have things which are very cheap and some very good. The books of the month, for example, are commercial writing; but some of them are almost perfectly done, almost works of art. Not completely, but almost. And the same with certain magazine pieces; some of them are wonderful. But very seldom can they be works of art, because a work of art can't be done for the purpose of pleasing a certain group of readers.

INTERVIEWER

How does this change the work? As the author you know whether or not you tailored a novel for a market, but looking at your work from the outside only, what difference would the reader see?

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SIMENON

The big difference would be in the concessions. In writing for any commercial purpose you have always to make concessions.

INTERVIEWER

To the idea that life is orderly and sweet, for example?

SIMENON

And the view of morals. Maybe that is the most important. You can't write anything commercial without accepting some code. There is always a code—like the code in Hollywood, and in television and radio. For example, there is now a very good program on television, it is probably the best for plays. The first two acts are always first-class. You have the impression of something completely new and strong, and then at the end the concession comes. Not always a happy end, but something comes to arrange everything from the point of view of a morality or philosophy—you know. All the characters, who were beautifully done, change completely in the ten last minutes.

INTERVIEWER

In your non-commercial novels you feel no need to make concessions of any sort?

SIMENON

I never do that, never, never, never. Otherwise I wouldn't write. It's too painful to do it if it's not to go to the end.

INTERVIEWER

You have shown me the manila envelopes you use in starting novels. Before you actually begin writing, how much have you been working consciously on the plan of that particular novel?

SIMENON

As you suggest we have to distinguish here between consciously and unconsciously. Unconsciously I probably always have two or three, not novels not ideas about novels but themes in my mind. I never even am thinking that they will serve for a novel; more exactly, they are the things about which I worry for myself. Two days before I write a novel I will consciously take up one of those ideas. But even

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before I consciously take it up I will first find some atmosphere. Today here there is some sun. I will remember such and such a spring, maybe a spring in some small Italian town or some place in the French provinces or in Arizona, I don't know, and then, little by little a small world will come into my mind, with a few characters. Those characters will be partly from people I have known and partly from pure imagination—you know. It's a complex of both. And then the idea I had before will come and stick around them. They will have the same problem I have in my mind myself. And the problem—with those people—will give me the novel.

INTERVIEWER

This is a couple of days before?

SIMENON

Yes, a couple of days. Because as soon as I have the beginning I can't bear it very long; so the next day I will take my envelope, take my telephone book for names, and take my town map—you know, to see exactly where things happen. And two days later I will begin. And the beginning will be always the same; it is almost a geometrical question: I have such a man, such a woman, in such surroundings. What can happen to them to oblige them to go to their limit? That's the question. It will be sometimes a very simple incident, anything which will change their lives. Then I write my novel chapter by chapter.

INTERVIEWER

What has gone on the planning envelope? Not an outline of the action?

SIMENON

No, no. I know nothing about the events when I begin the novel. On the envelope I put only the names of the characters, their ages, their family. I know nothing whatever about the events which will occur later. Otherwise it would not be interesting to me.

INTERVIEWER

When do the incidents begin to form?

SIMENON

On the eve of the first day I know what will happen in the

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first chapter. Then, day after day, chapter after chapter, I find what will come later. After I have started a novel I write a chapter each day, without ever missing a day. Because it is a strain, I have to keep pace with the novel. If, for example, I am ill for forty-eight hours I will have to throw away the previous chapters. And I will never return to that novel.

INTERVIEWER

When you did commercial fiction, was your method at all similar?

SIMENON

No. Not at all. When I did a commercial novel I didn't think about that novel except in the hours of writing it. But when I am doing a novel now I don't see anybody, I don't speak to anybody, I don't take a phone call—I live just like a monk. All the day I am one of my characters. I feel like him.

INTERVIEWER

You are the same character all the way through the writing of that novel?

SIMENON

Always, because most of my novels show what happens around one character. The other characters are always seen by one character. So it is in this character's skin I have to be. And it's almost unbearable after five or six days. That is one of the reasons my novels are so short; after eleven days I can't— It's impossible. I have to— It's physical. I am too tired.

INTERVIEWER

I should think so. Especially if you drive the main character to his limit.

SIMENON

Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER

And you are playing this role with him, you are—

SIMENON

Yes. And it's awful. That is why, before I start a novel—this may sound foolish here but it is the truth—generally a few days before the start of a novel I look to see that I don't have any appointments for eleven days. Then, I call the

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doctor. He takes my blood pressure, he checks everything. And he says, "OK."

INTERVIEWER

Cleared for action.

SIMENON

Exactly. Because I have to be sure that I am good for the eleven days.

INTERVIEWER

Does he come again at the end of the eleven days?

SIMENON

Generally.

INTERVIEWER

His idea or yours?

SIMENON

It's his idea.

INTERVIEWER

What does he find ?

SIMENON

The blood pressure is usually down.

INTERVIEWER

What does he think of this? Is it all right?

SIMENON

He thinks it is all right but unhealthy to do it too often.

INTERVIEWER

Does he ration you?

SIMENON

Yes. Sometimes he will say, "Look, after this novel take two months off." For example, yesterday he said, "OK, but how many novels do you want to do before you go away for the summer?" I said, "Two." "OK," he said.

INTERVIEWER

Fine. I'd like to ask now whether you see any pattern in the development of your views as they have worked out in your novels.

SIMENON

I am not the one who discovered it, but some critics in

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France did. All my life, my literary life, if I may say so, I have taken several problems for my novels, and about every ten years I have taken up the same problems from another point of view. . I have the impression that I will never, probably, find the answer. I know of certain problems I have taken more than five times.

INTERVIEWER

And do you know that you will take those up again?

SIMENON

Yes, I will. And then there are a few problems—if I may call them problems—that I know I will never take again, because I have the impression that I went to the end of them. I don't any more care about them.

INTERVIEWER

What are some of the problems you have dealt with often and expect to deal with in future?

SIMENON

One of them, for example, which will probably haunt me more than any other is the problem of communication. I mean communication between two people. The fact that we are I don't know how many millions of people, yet communication, complete communication, is completely impossible between two of those people to me is one of the biggest tragic themes in the world. When I was a young boy I was afraid of it. I would almost scream because of it. It gave me such a sensation of solitude, of loneliness. That is a theme I have taken I don't know how many times. But I know it will come again. Certainly it will come again.

INTERVIEWER

And another?

SIMENON

Another seems to be the theme of escape. Between two days changing your life completely: without caring at all what has happened before, just go. You know what I mean?

INTERVIEWER

Starting over?

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SIMENON

Not even starting over. Going to nothing.

INTERVIEWER

I see. Is either of these themes or another not far in the offing as a subject, do you suppose? Or is it harmful to ask this?

SIMENON

One is not very far away, probably. It is something on the theme of father and child, of two generations, man coming and man going. That's not completely it, but I don't see it neatly enough just yet to speak about it.

INTERVIEWER

This theme could be associated with the theme of lack of communication?

SIMENON

That's it; it is another branch of the same problem.

INTERVIEWER

What themes do you feel rather certain you will not deal with again?

SIMENON

One, I think, is the theme of the disintegration of a unit, and the unit was generally a family.

INTERVIEWER

Have you treated this theme often?

SIMENON

Two or three times, maybe more.

INTERVIEWER

In the novel *Pedigree?*

SIMENON

In *Pedigree* you have it, yes. If I had to choose one of my books to live and not the others, I would never choose *Pedigree.*

INTERVIEWER

What one might you choose?

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SIMENON

The next one.

INTERVIEWER

And the next one after that?

SIMENON

That's it. It's always the next one. You see, even technically I have the feeling now that I am very far away from the goal.

INTERVIEWER

Apart from the next ones, would you be willing to nominate a published novel to survive?

SIMENON

No one. Because when a novel is finished I have always the impression that I have not succeeded. I am not discouraged, but I see—I want to try again.

But one thing—I consider my novels about all on the same level, yet there are steps. After a group of five or six novels I have a kind of—I don't like the word "progress"—but there seems to be a progress. There is a jump in quality, I think. So every five or six novels there is one I prefer to the others.

INTERVIEWER

Of the novels now most available which one would you say was one of these?

SIMENON

The Brothers Rico. The story might be the same if instead of a gangster you had the cashier of one of our banks or a teacher we might know.

INTERVIEWER

A man's position is threatened and so he will do anything to keep it?

SIMENON

That's it. A man who always wants to be on top with the small group where he lives. And who will sacrifice anything to stay there. And he may be a very good man, but he made such an effort to be where he is that he will never accept not to be there any more.

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INTERVIEWER

I like the simple way that novel does so much.

SIMENON

I tried to do it very simply, simply. And there is not a single "literary" sentence there, you know? It's written as by a child.

INTERVIEWER

You spoke earlier about thinking of atmosphere when you first think of a novel.

SIMENON

What I mean by atmosphere might be translated by "the poetic line." You understand what I mean?

INTERVIEWER

Is "mood" close enough?

SIMENON

Yes. And with the mood goes the season, goes the detail—at first it is almost like a musical theme.

INTERVIEWER

And so far in no way geographically located?

SIMENON

Not at all. That's the atmosphere for me, because I try—and I don't think I have done it, for otherwise the critics would have discovered it—I try to do with prose, with the novel, what generally is done with poetry. I mean I try to go beyond the real, and the explainable ideas, and to explore the man—not doing it by the sound of the words as the poetical novels of the beginning of the century tried to do. I can't explain technically but—I try to put in my novels some things which you can't explain. To give some message which does not exist practically. You understand what I mean? I read a few days ago that T. S. Eliot, whom I admire very much, wrote that poetry is necessary in plays having one kind of story and not in plays having another, that it depends on the subject you treat. I don't think so. I think you may have the same secret message to give with

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any kind of subject. If your vision of the world is of a certain kind you will put poetry in everything, necessarily.

But I am probably the only one who thinks there is something of this kind in my books.

INTERVIEWER

One time you spoke about your wish to write the "pure" novel. Is this what you were speaking of a while ago—about cutting out the "literary" words and sentences—or does it also include the poetry you have just spoken of?

SIMENON

The "pure" novel will do only what the novel can do. I mean that it doesn't have to do any teaching or any work of journalism. In a pure novel you wouldn't take sixty pages to describe the South or Arizona or some country in Europe. Just the drama with only what is absolutely part of this drama. What I think about novels today is almost a translation of the rules of tragedy into the novel. I think the novel is the tragedy for our day.

INTERVIEWER

Is length important? Is it part of your definition of the pure novel?

SIMENON

Yes. That sounds like a practical question, but I think it is important, for the same reason you can't see a tragedy in more than one sitting. I think that the pure novel is too tense for the reader to stop in the middle and take it up the next day.

INTERVIEWER

Because television and movies and magazines are under the codes you have spoken of, I take it you feel the writer of the pure novel is almost obligated to write freely.

SIMENON

Yes. And there is a second reason why he should be. I think that now, for reasons probably political, propagandists are trying to create a type of man. I think the novelist has to show man as he is and not the man of propaganda. And I do not mean only political propaganda; I mean the man they

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teach in the third grade of school, a man who has nothing to do with man as he really is.

INTERVIEWER

What is your experience with conversion of your books for movies and radio?

SIMENON

These are very important for the writer today. For they are probably the way the writer may still be independent. You asked me before whether I ever change anything in one of my novels commercially. I said, "No." But I would have to do it without the radio, television, and movies.

INTERVIEWER

You once told me Gide made a helpful practical suggestion about one of your novels. Did he influence your work in any more general way?

SIMENON

I don't think so. But with Gide it was funny. In 1936 my publisher said he wanted to give a cocktail party so we could meet, for Gide had said he had read my novels and would like to meet me. So I went, and Gide asked me questions for more than two hours. After that I saw him many times. And he wrote me almost every month and sometimes oftener until he died. Always to ask questions. When I went to visit him I always saw my books with so many notes in the margins that it was almost more Gide than Simenon. I never asked him about them; I was very shy about it. So now I will never know.

INTERVIEWER

Did he ask you any special kinds of questions?

SIMENON

Everything, but especially about the mechanism of my—may I use the word? it seems pretentious—creation. And I think I know why he was interested. I think Gide all his life had the dream of being the creator instead of the moralist, the philosopher. I was exactly his opposite, and I think that is why he was interested.

I had the same experience five years before with Count

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Keyserling. He wrote me exactly the same way Gide did. He asked me to visit him at Darmstadt. I went there and he asked me questions for three days and three nights. He came to see me in Paris and asked me more questions and gave me a commentary on each of my books. For the same reason.

Keyserling called me an "*imbécile de génie.*"

INTERVIEWER

I remember you once told me that in your commercial novels you would sometimes insert a non-commercial passage or chapter.

SIMENON

Yes, to train myself.

INTERVIEWER

How did that part differ from the rest of its novel?

SIMENON

Instead of writing just the story, in this chapter I tried to give a third dimension, not necessarily to the whole chapter, perhaps to a room, to a chair, to some object. It would be easier to explain it in the terms of painting.

INTERVIEWER

How?

SIMENON

To give the weight. A commercial painter paints flat; you can put your finger through. But a painter—for example an apple by Cézanne has weight. And it has juice, everything. With just three strokes. I tried to give to my words just the weight that a stroke of Cézanne's gave to an apple. That is why most of the time I use concrete words. I try to avoid abstract words. Or poetical words, you know, like "crepuscule," for example. It is very nice, but it gives nothing. Do you understand? To avoid every stroke which does not give something to this third dimension.

On this point, I think that what the critics call my "atmosphere" is nothing but the Impressionism of the painter adapted to literature. My childhood was spent at the time of the Impressionists and I was always in the museums and exhibitions. That gave me a kind of sense of it. I was haunted by it.

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INTERVIEWER

Have you ever dictated fiction, commercial or any other?

SIMENON

No. I am an artisan; I need to work with my hands. I would like to carve my novel in a piece of wood. My characters—I would like to have them heavier, more three-dimensional. And I would like to make a man so that everybody, looking at him, would find his own problems in this man. That's why I spoke about poetry, because this goal looks more like a poet's goal than the goal of a novelist. My characters have a profession, have characteristics; you know their age, their family situation, and everything. But I try to make each one of those characters heavy, like a statue, and to be the brother of everybody in the world. [*Pausing*] And what makes me happy is the letters I get. They never speak about my beautiful style; they are the letters a man would write to his doctor or his psychoanalyst. They say, "You are one who understands me. So many times I find myself in your novels." Then there are pages of their confidences; and they are not crazy pople. There are crazy people too, of course; but many are on the contrary people who—even important people. I am surprised.

INTERVIEWER

Early in your life did any particular book or author especially impress you?

SIMENON

Probably the one who impressed me most was Gogol. And certainly Dostoievski, but less then Gogol.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think Gogol interested you?

SIMENON

Maybe because he makes characters who are just like everyday people but at the same time have what I called a few minutes ago the third dimension I am looking for. All of them have this poetic aura. But not the Oscar Wilde kind. A poetry which comes naturally, which is there. The kind Conrad has. Each character has the weight of sculpture, it is so heavy, so dense.

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INTERVIEWER

Dostoievski said of himself and some of his fellow writers that they came out from Gogol's *Overcoat* and now you feel you do too.

SIMENON

Yes. Gogol. And Dostoievski.

INTERVIEWER

When you and I were discussing a particular trial while it was going on a year or two ago, you said you often followed such newspaper accounts with interest. Do you ever in following them say to yourself, "This is something I might some day work into a novel?"

SIMENON

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you consciously file it away?

SIMENON

No. I just forget I said it might be useful some day, and three or four or ten years later it comes. I don't keep a file.

INTERVIEWER

Speaking of trials, what would you say is the fundamental difference, if there is any, between your detective fiction—such as the Maigret which you finished a few days ago—and your more serious novels?

SIMENON

Exactly the same difference that exists between the painting of a painter and the sketch he will make for his pleasure or for his friends or to study something.

INTERVIEWER

In the Maigrets you look at the character only from the point of view of the detective?

SIMENON

Yes. Maigret can't go inside a character. He will see, explain, and understand; but he does not give the character the weight the character should have in another of my novels.

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INTERVIEWER

So in the eleven days spent writing a Maigret novel your blood pressure does not change much?

SIMENON

No. Very little.

INTERVIEWER

You are not driving the detective to the limit of his endurance.

SIMENON

That's it. So I only have the natural fatigue of being so many hours at the typewriter. But otherwise, no.

INTERVIEWER

One more question, if I may. Has published, general criticism ever in any way made you consciously change the way you write? From what you say I should imagine not.

SIMENON

Never. [*Pausing, and looking down*] I have a very, very strong will about my writing, and I will go my way. For instance, all the critics for twenty years have said the same thing: "It is time for Simenon to give us a big novel, a novel with twenty or thirty characters." They do not understand. I will never write a big novel. My big novel is the mosaic of all my small novels. [*Looking up*] You understand?

—CARVEL COLLINS

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THE PARTING FIRE

Much time is gone, I speak of parting fire
Like realms of sunset in the mist of trees.
Because you know affection not desire

Endures, you do not grieve when flames expire,
When nights come on like dirtied memories.
Much time is gone, I speak of parting fire.

An amateur of grief, but not a liar,
You think of me (your lovely flesh agrees)
Because you know affection not desire

Leaves area for thought, and you attire
Yourself in contemplation to the knees.
Much time is gone, I speak of parting fire.

You say that loving always must require
A gentleness, though painful it would please,
Because you know affection not desire

Is tender in its touch. I too aspire
To tenderness: honey with stings of bees.
Much time is gone, I speak of parting fire
Because you know affection not desire.

ROBERT PACK

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WARD BOWERS

THE ADMIRAL'S HAT

A light rain filtered through the huge elm trees and covered the park benches with a fine mist. Although it was a mild midsummer afternoon the rain had sent most of the bench sitters scurrying for cover, and a quiet air of desertion hung over the street. The street paralleled a city park golf course, and came to a dead end at the lake front. Occasionally the voices of golfers could be heard across the heavy growth of bushes which separated the fairways from the sidewalk.

An old man sat on one of the benches at the far end of the street. He wore a threadbare navy blue yachting coat with gold buttons, a soiled white tee shirt, white cotton pants, and a pair of dirty grey tennis sneakers. A battered yachting cap tilted to a rakish angle clung to his head. A certain dignity of bearing coupled with the open intelligence of his large unshaven face made him appear rather more impressive than ridiculous.

A Negro boy perhaps ten or eleven squatted on his haunches in the wet grass opposite the man. The boy methodically flipped a rock up and down, up and down, in the palm of his right hand. He glared across at the old man with a ferocity that was frightening to see in a boy this age. A soggy bathing suit hung from his belt, and his brown knees gapped through holes in his jeans. "I'll *fix* you, you old rummy," the boy said.

The old man laughed. "A bloody little black tiger, that's what you are sonny." The old man removed a pint bottle of wine from his pocket. He took a long pull at the bottle, and then held it toward the boy.

"Some joke," the boy said.

"Are you going to use that rock?" the old man asked.

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"You should see the mark on my leg," the boy said. "Itsa 'bout a mile long and it stings like hell. You should'n of hit me with that stick the other day, especially when I did'n do nothing to you."

"Teach you some manners," the old man said.

"I've got manners."

"Well, then your friends. Goddam pack of idiots, calling names and annoying me."

"I didn' call you names," the boy said, "I was standing there watching."

"Maybe so," the old man said. "I didn't try to hit anyone in particular. I just wanted them to go away." He took another drink from the bottle.

"Whadaya wear that crazy outfit for?" the boy asked. "Ya think you're an admiral or something?"

"That's how it started the other day," the old man answered. "What I wear is my own damn business."

"Who you hit too, I suppose," the boy said.

"What the hell, sonny, it was an accident. Won't you accept my apology?" He burlesqued a formal bow, bending the upper part of his body forward, lowering his head, sweeping his right arm down and across his body until his fingers trailed along the pavement. "Now go on home," he said.

"I'll go when I feel like it."

"I don't believe you're going to throw that rock," the old man said. "Not unless I provoke you in some way."

"Don't you worry about this old rock."

The boy watched a squirrel warily circle one of the big elms. The sound of thunder reverberated along the darkening street, and the rain continued to fall. The old man had another long drink from his bottle. Some of the wine dribbled along his chin, and a crafty look came into his eyes.

"I'll tell you what, sonny. I'll wager I can make you throw that rock. If I lose I'll give you a quarter. If you lose, you go home."

"You better not fool with me," the boy said uneasily.

"Shall I tell you the story of Black Sambo?" the old man asked.

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"Cut it out," the boy demanded.

"Eeney, meney, miney, mo, catch a nigger by the toe, if he hollers let him go." The old man giggled viciously as he finished.

The boy was now standing. "You better watch out," he shouted.

"Looks like you're sensitive, too," the old man said. "I've got me a little black nigger boy by the toe. A nigger boy with steel wool for hair and buckshot for brains. Yassah, niggah boy, ya all want some watahmelon?"

The boy hurled the rock at the old man's head. The rock glanced across his skull and knocked his yachting cap to the pavement. The old man did not move. A thin line of blood crept along his forehead. The boy approached and stood before the old man.

"You shouldn't of said those things," the boy said hesitantly.

"Go on home, now," the old man said. "You were right to throw the rock. You can't let people talk to you like that."

The boy hesitated a moment, started to say something but decided against it, then turned and started running along the street. His wet bathing suit slapped against his legs as he ran.

The old man still had not moved. The sound of the boy's running feet faded into the distance. An occasional bird noise nudged the sepulchral afternoon quiet. The rain became heavier and formed a pool in the bottom of the old man's upturned fallen hat.

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A CONTEMPT FOR DYLAN THOMAS— TURLEYGOD POOR THOMAS

Sir Thomas, stark green until he crept acurl
into the bed of marriage, put ripeness on
in the soft white embraces of a girl,
misliked the very thought of such conjunction
and wished that we could love like plants and trees
joined by the trade of winds and hairs of bees.

poor Turleygod Thomas, his images askew
when men were making things of men, would hint
(being afraid no heaven can be true)
that thinghood is the heaven of the saint,
that man, poor gull, must wet his burning wings
and sink them in the sea of peaceful things.

o ragged Thomas, to stones, flowers, fire
believing, may not stones lie, fire fever in its flame,
and trees endure an agony of flower?
can we, to comprehend and feel its shame
creep into the full bosom of a stone
too dull to speak and make its hurt sense known?

—Wilfred Watson

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Sixteen

Here are sixteen painters of widely varying geographical and national origins but with one thing in common—they have all loved France and depicted her faces, her fields, her changing skies. Here are their self-portraits, sixteen personal expressions—and again one thing in common: the casual line, the calligraphic flourish, the seemingly improvised sketch concealing the artists' years of study and exercise.

(Left) YVES BRAYER (Born Versailles, 1907) is the painter of the hot south: the Midi, La Camargue—even Spain—and of horses, fêtes, sun-flooded town squares.

(Following pages) HENRI MATISSE (Born Cateau, Nord, 1869—died Vence, 1955). His magistral simplicity now delights the world, but his first exhibition brought chalked warnings on the walls of Montparnasse—"Matisse is as dangerous as absinthe!" CARZOU (the Midi, 1907) is represented in collections everywhere, and in recent years his extraordinary decors for *Les Indes Galantes*, *Le Loup*, *Giselle* and *Athalie* have made his name a household word for the theatre-going public. MAURICE BRIANCHON (1899, in the

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self-portraits

Sarthe) is in the line of Vuillard, prefers a muted palette for his strong canvases of horsemen, moody landscapes, his decors for the Opera and Comedie. ROGER CHAPELAIN-MIDY (Paris, 1904) studied engineering before turning to painting; has created huge quantities of tapestry designs, illustrations, decors. MARCEL VERTÈS (born Roumania). His dashing sketch here is representative of his tender and impudent paintings, his famous advertisements for Schiaparelli, his theatre designs, his *galant* drawings for private editions. MASSIMO CAMPIGLIO (Florence, 1895) came to Paris for Italian newspaper in 1919, discovered Montparnasse and painting at one fell swoop, has created a "Campigli woman", as personal an image as Vertès' *gamine*. ANTONI CLAVE (Barcelona, 1913) is Spanish and exuberant. He prefers a predominance of purple, scarlet and black for his decorative canvases, and for such ballet settings as his famous *Carmen* for Roland Petit. MARC CHAGALL (Vitebsk, 1887) left Russia for Paris in 1922, has lived there save for war years in New York, lately has settled near Vence to work in graphic processes, never leaving his chosen subjects from poetry and the folktale. JACQUES VILLON (1875, in the Eure) has embraced more trends than perhaps even Picasso, has found his ideal expression in his latest bright prismatic abstractions of things seen. RAYMOND SAVIGNAC (1907) is a poster artist of great elegance and drollery, beloved of the Parisian public and now conquering America with his *Life* advertisements. FERNAND LÉGER (1881, at Argentan) draws himself as a scowling *Maître*, at variance with the highly-colored gaiety of his monumental canvases. FONTANAROSA (Paris, 1912) loves hunting, has painted bold still-lives of pheasants and rabbits, landscapes in autumnal richness. FOUJITA (Tokyo, 1886) has been in Paris since 1913, toured the world four times, has never lost his love for girls, cats, and roses. BERNARD BUFFET (Paris, 1926) first exhibited at the Salon d'Automne of 1947, was quickly recognised as most promising of the younger painters, won the Prix de la Critique in 1948. KEES VAN DONGEN (Delfshaven, Holland, 1877) was a house-painter and porter in Les Halles before selling his first pictures, and finally exhibited with the Fauves, of which group he is sole survivor.

—E. W.

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MATISSE

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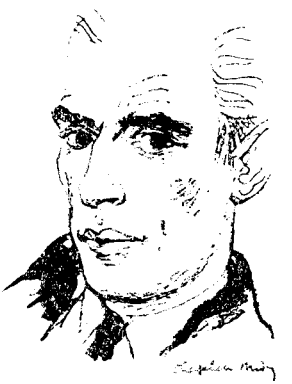
CARZOU

BRIANCHON

CHAPLAIN-MIDY



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VERTÈS

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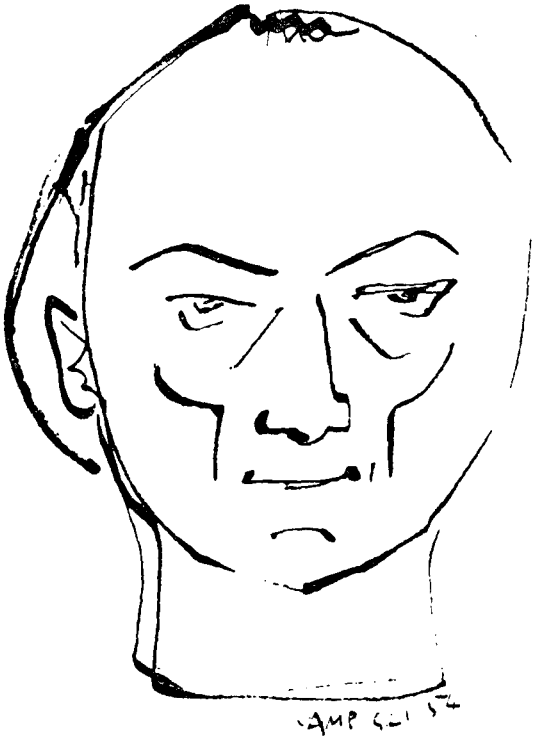

CAMPIGLI

CLAVÉ

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CHAGALL

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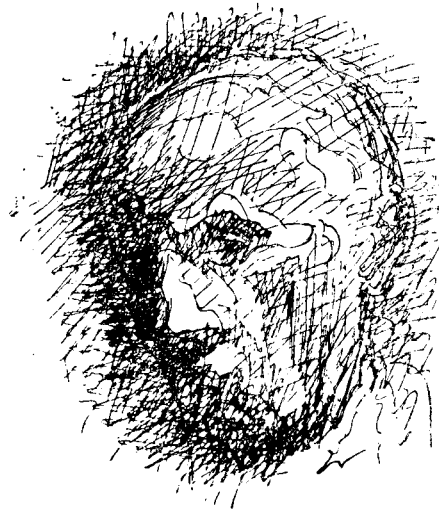
SAVIGNAC



VILLON

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LÉGER

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FONTANAROSA

FOUJITA

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BUFFET

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VAN DONGEN

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TWO POEMS
By Adrienne Cecile Rich

LOVERS ARE LIKE CHILDREN

Chagall's sweet lovers mounting into blue
Remind me that discovery by two
Of any world the mind can wander through

Is like the time when, young and left alone,
We touched the secret fringe of being one,
Back of the playground filled with Everyone.

Love is like childhood, caught in trust and fear.
The statues point to omens in the air,
And yet the fountains bubble bright and clear.

Lost in the garden rank with contradiction,
We see the fences sprout for our affliction,
And the red-rose-tree curtly labelled Fiction.

Nothing to tell us whether what they mean
Is true of this or any other scene.
We only know the summer leaves are green,

Alive and dense for two to penetrate—
An exploration difficult and great
As when one day beside the schoolyard gate,

Straggling behind to glean a sunlit stone,
One first perceived and knew itself as one.
Now add this pebble to that early one.

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LAST SONG

All in the day that I was born,
I walked across the shouting corn,
I saw the sunlight flash and hail
From every spire and every sail;
But most I leaned against the sky
To hear the eagles racing by,
And all the safety of the womb
Could not betray me, lure me home.

All in the day that I was wed
I saw them strew my bridal bed.
I smelled the wind across the sheets
Breathing of lavender and sweets
That neither sea nor meadow knew;
And when my bride was brought to view
I kept a hundred candles lit
All for light and the joy of it.

All in the day that I grew old
I felt the wind blow salt and cold
Like seaspray on my shaking thighs
Or sand flung up to blind my eyes.
I cried for sun and the eagles flying,
But felt those fingers spying, prying,
The same that wrenched me into life
And cut my safety with a knife.

Soon they will bind me dark and warm
And impotent to suffer harm,
I shall be exiled to the womb
Where once I lay and thought it home.
The sun that flashed my first delight
Shall never learn to cleave that night;
And all the swords of danger fly
Far from the caul in which I lie.

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KENNETH TYNAN

THE DEATH OF MANOLETE

MANUEL Rodriguez 'Manolete' had entered his thirty-first year on July 4th, 1947. His birthplace was Cordoba, a hundred and twenty kilometres down the Guadalquivir from Linares. Since 1939 he had been at the height of his profession; lean, hawk-nosed, and saturnine, he was dubbed 'The Monster', and the national idolatry he commanded was greater even than that accorded to Belmonte. The gossips said that the incessant strain of having to be always at his best had lately been driving him to the bottle; Camara, his agent and friend, had confessed that he often seemed a somnambulist, so badly was he weakened by late hours and deep drinking.

On July 16th, fighting unpaid in a charity corrida at Madrid, he had been gored by a Bohorquez bull and, although swaying on his feet, completed the faena and kill before consenting to be carried to the infirmary, where the bull's ears were brought to him. His convalescence took three weeks and meant the cancellation of six contracts. On August 4th, still groggy, he reappeared at Vitoria, cutting an ear. He fought again in the same town on the 5th, and travelled during the next ten days to Valdepenas, San Sebastian, Huesca, and Gijon; in all four places he seemed ominously shaky. On the 16th he returned to San Sebastian on the same programme as Luis Miguel, his most serious rival among the younger men, and cut both ears of his first bull. As the cheers died, he was asked by a radio commentator in the callejon to say a few words. He responded laconically: "They ask of me more than I can give. I would say only one thing, and that is that I wish it were October and the season were ended." He failed in the second bull, and the crowd jeered. That evening he dined with his mother, and then

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departed for Toledo, where he had a spectacular success on the 17th.

A few days later he gave an interview to a journalist in which he said he had decided to retire at the end of the year. "I am out of temper," he said. "The public expects more of me every time I appear. It is impossible." Before a hostile audience in Gijon on the 24th he was lamentably bad, and two days later, at Santander, he heard only mild applause. Meanwhile, the posters were already up in Jaen and Cordoba and the villages of the Guadalsuivir valley, announcing the cartels for the feria at Linares. Two corridas had been organized, in the first of which, fixed for the 28th, Gitanillo de Triana, Manolete, and Luis Miguel would meet six Miura bulls.

On the evening of Wednesday the 27th, Manolete left Madrid by car, accompanied by Camara, a bullfight journalist named Bellon, and Guillermo, his chauffeur-cum-sword-handler. They arrived in Linares soon after dawn next day, having driven all night, and Manolete went straight to his room to rest. At eleven he rose; the hubbub of a town *en fête* welled up from the streets. He breakfasted lightly on fruit, and received handshakes from a few friends. The fight was timed to begin at five-thirty: around four he put on the suit of lights and, after a few minutes of prayer, rose and faced Camara.

"How are the bulls, Pepe?"

"Fine. Not too big, not too little."

At five-fifteen he was driven to the bullring, looking as bleak and impassive as always.

The Plazza de Toros at Linares, officially classified as a second-category ring, holds ten thousand spectators. It was full to overflowing. The three matadors were greeted with an ovation, to acknowledge which Manolete led them out, montera in hand, to the middle of the circle. Gitanillo, a once-brilliant gypsy, two years Manolete's senior and for many years his friend, took the first Miura. It lacked power, but was frank with the capes, and Gitanillo received scattered

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applause. The second, Manolete's, showed even less caste; he gave it a few derechazos in a dangerous terrain and then, seeing that its will was ebbing rapidly, resorted to flashy and meaningless adornos which dismayed the purists in the crowd. He killed with a pinchazo and a forward estocada; "the bull," says Francisco Narbona in his book *Manolete*, "deserved no better"; and the audience gently applauded.

Luis Miguel, eager to outdo the maestro, was lucky in a fine third bull. He put in two pairs of sticks himself and brought off a neat faena based on two series of naturals; though he killed less than well, the crowd insisted that an ear be awarded. A slight misunderstanding followed, of a kind all too common in country rings; Luis Miguel's head peon presented him with both ears and the tail. This over-enthusiasm brought noisy protests, and Luis Miguel had to be content with a single trophy. With the fourth bull Gitanillo was uncertain and took no risks. Then came the fifth.

It was small and black, the number branded on its flank was 21, and its name was Islero. It was the one thousand and fourth bull of Manolete's career. During the preliminary rushes at the cape it halted menacingly, and disconcerted the banderilleros by a habit of turning suddenly in its own length. Standing in the callejon Camara noticed this and nudged Manolete:

"Manolo, I don't like him. Keep the cloth low and finish him off quickly."

The trumpet sounded, and Manolete set about coming to terms with the Miura. After a few punishment passes, low down with the right hand, he lifted the muleta for three slow passes en redondo. It was obvious by now that the bull favoured its right horn. It was hooking towards the barrera all the time, and some of the crowd were getting restive. Icily proud, he hushed them with a sequence of his own majestic manoletinas. Guillermo, scared by this display of imprudence, hissed from the burladero:

"Take it easy, maestro!"

Manolete did not hear. He went in to kill, but not safely, running out to the left of the horns, as most toreros would

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have done in the circumstances. He lined the bull up in the *suerte contraria*, with its left horn nearer to the barrera, so that his escape would be the perilous way, out to the middle of the ring. It is said that Manolete's determination to outshine Luis Miguel was mainly responsible for the mighty volapié which followed. I prefer to think that he needed no spur to kill as he did. It was an estocada in slow motion. The bull stood twenty paces from the tunnel through which the paseo had entered the ring. Manolete drew back his shoulders and advanced inch by inch on the horns. Almost languidly, he pushed the sword home into the right place, up to the pommel. In that instant Islero raised his head, and stabbed his right horn, the bad one, into the upper part of Manolete's right thigh. He whirled up on the horn, spinning round on the point, which jabbed deeper into the wound with half a ton of Islero's weight behind it. He flew up and landed between the bull's forehoofs. David, Manolete's head peon, took the horns away with his cape. Guillermo was the first to run out to the stricken man's aid; after him Camara; and then the other peons, Cantimplas and El Sevillano. In their haste to reach the infirmary they carried Manolete, limp and etiolated, through the wrong door, and seconds passed before the bullring attendants showed them the right way.

Meanwhile Islero plodded over to the fence, and died. It was exactly forty-two minutes past six in the evening. "What happened afterwards in the bullring in Linares," says Senor Narbona, "is no concern of history's."

The cheers pursued Manolete to the infirmary, but he was already insensible, and did not hear the last ovation of his life. When the doctors were completing their examination, David burst into the room with the ears and tail of Islero, which had been won so purely. Swarms of well-meaning onlookers filled the air with cigar-smoke, and a jug of water had to be brought to moisten Manolete's lips. Blood was spurting from his leg in irregular gushes, and a transfusion was urgently required. The first volunteer was Juan Sanchez Calle, a police officer and close friend of the torero. While the operation was taking place, wooden chairs were

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being arranged in the bullring for the film show which had been announced for later in the evening, and a silent crowd gathered aound Manolete's great blue car, which stood empty in the courtyard outside. A medical report was posted outside the infirmary. It said baldly that Manolete had been injured in the groin, and that the wound had taken three trajectories—inwards, upwards and downwards: the result of the brief moment in which he had spun on the horn. The femoral artery was badly damaged, there was extensive haemorrhage and violent traumatic shock. "Outlook very grave." This was signed by Doctor Garrido and has been much commented on. Medical opinion now holds the view that Manolete was killed not by the wound itself but by the traumatic shock which it induced. Shock had unbalanced the vital triumvirate of brain, heart, and lungs by which we live; and his nervous system, already delibitated, could stand no further punishment. After a short conference, the doctors decided to summon the help of Jiménez Guinea, the Madrid bullring surgeon, who was spending the summer at El Escorial, more than two hundred miles to the north.

At eight o'clock Manolete regained consciousness. His peons were at his bedside, together with Camara, Gitanillo, and Luis Miguel. He murmured to Cantimplas:

"Ayee—but my groin hurts."

The peon mumbled a few words of comfort. Manolete turned towards Camara and asked:

"Is it in a bad place?"

It was in the worst place, but no one spoke. He then asked for water, and Luis Miguel poured a little through his arid lips. At eight-thirty a second transfusion was performed. His resistance was still very low, but he revived enough to grip the hands of those around him, saying:

"Move my leg a little. That's better. It was hurting me."

It was now agreed that he should be transferred to the municipal hospital in Linares. They carried him out of the infirmary on a stretcher. The crowd in the streets heard him utter two words. "Hurry!" he said: and again: "Hurry!" But the hospital of San José was a good distance off, and

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twenty minutes passed before he was on the operating table. Meantime one of his peons telephoned the diestro's mother in San Sebastian.

"What has happened?" she said.

"Listen," he said, "Manolo has been caught in the leg. Yes, it's a cornada, but nothing special, nothing of any interest."

"Go on," said his mother.

"Well, he cut the ears and the tail. Pay no attention to the papers and the radio—you know what they are. All that stuff about arteries and so on! It isn't important. Don't alarm yourself."

Just after ten-thirty, one of his mother's friends, the impresario Pablo Martinez Elizondo, spoke to Camara by telephone from San Sebastian and heard the worst. As casually as he could, he suggested to the senora that she might like to be at her son's side. "Not that it's very serious, but I think he would be pleased to see you." At eleven they left together for Linares. "Of course if it was really bad," she said, 'they would have taken him to Madrid.'

By this time word of the goring had spread across the whole country; in Madrid, Seville, and Barcelona no one talked of anything else. At midnight a third blood transfusion was performed and Manolete was removed from the operating theatre to a hospital bed. He asked for a cigarette, but could not smoke it : after three puffs it fell to the ground. He sighed, and said to Alvaro Domecq, the equestrian bullfighter, who had joined the group at the bedside:

"This is a bad feeling."

Professional pride revived for a moment, and he asked:

"Did I kill the bull with that estocada?"

They told him he had killed it.

"And—didn't they give me an ear?"

Camara replied that they had given him both ears and the tail. He smiled. A few minutes later, he shook his head and whispered:

"How my mother will suffer!"

At 4 a. m. he began to grow terribly pale. He was able to recognise Domingo Ortega when the latter arrived, but could

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do no more than make a feeble gesture of apology. Shortly afterwards Gitanillo, who had driven like a madman, drew up with Doctor Guinea in the blue car. Guinea examined the dying man and discussed the situation with Doctor Tamames, whom Luis Miguel had called in. They decided not to move him.

"Don Luis," said Manolete to Doctor Guinea, whom he knew well, "what can you do for me?"

Guinea told him to close his eyes and rest. To limit the circulation he then applied tighter bandages to both legs. Minutes passed, and Manolete said faintly:

"I can't feel anything in my legs, doctor."

Guinea soothed him and again told him to rest. After a while he said:

"I can't see you, Don Luis."

His eyes were open. Guinea said:

"Close your eyes and don't worry. All is well."

There was no hope. A few minutes before five the hospital chaplain administered extreme unction. When this was done, Manolete called suddenly for his oldest peon:

"David..."

His lips went on moving, but the words were lost. At seven minutes past five, as the sky was clearing over the town, a brief convulsion took place, but with it no great agony. Then Manolete's head slumped to the right, so that it faced a picture of the Virgin of the Macarena which stood by his bed. Doctor Tamames, who was taking his pulse, announced that he had given up his soul. Antonia, his mistress, who had been kept away fom the death-bed for fear of the effect her appearance might have on him, was now admitted, to weep over his body.

In the hospital chapel the first mass was celebrated in his memory. A little after ten o'clock his remains were taken in an ambulance to Cordoba, where they are now buried.

Deaths such as this have their echoes. All of Spain mourned Manolete, and with some members of his profession his mischance became a morbid pre-occupation. On September

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14th, just over two weeks after the disaster of Linares, the Mexican bullfighter José Gonzalez Lopez, known as *Carnicerito de Mexico*, was gored in the Portuguese bullring of Vila Vicosa. He was forty years old, competent with the cape and muleta and an acknowledged maestro with the banderillas. His second bull, a difficult manso, came treacherously to the faena, and, after submitting to two valiant statuary passes, caught Carnicerito high up in the right leg, severing the femoral artery. As he was being carried to the hospital, half a mile away, he said:

"Don't leave me. Take care of me. My cornada is like Manolete's."

He was convinced that he had been chosen to re-live Manolete's anguish, and nothing would dislodge the idea from his mind. He mouthed Manolete's words:

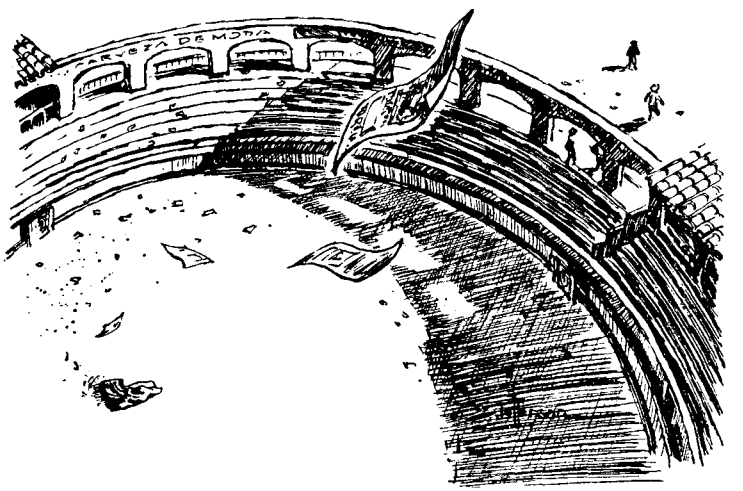
"I can't feel anything in my legs, doctor..."

And later:

"I can't see you, Don Luis..."

At half-past six next morning he called for extreme unction. Two hours later he began to sink, and Conchita Cintron, the *rejoneadora*, bent over to decipher his last words.

"Watch me," he said, "I am dying like Manolete."



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WINDOWS

These are the houses of the poor—
Strange animals... they live in view...
That woman on the second floor,
There's nothing that she wants to do.

She sits unmoving in the light,
She combs her hair, walks to and fro,
Argues with someone out of sight—
There's nowhere that she wants to go.

She cleans and cooks, sits down to eat,
And does the dishes. When she dies
The neighbors wash her dirty feet
And draw the blinds that were her eyes.

—Louis Simpson

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GILBERT FARLANE
adapted by PATRICK BOWLES

THE DESERTER

THE Massif has a perimeter of approximately one hundred and twenty miles and its rock face rises impregnable and sheer as a fortress to three thousand feet, and it dominates the *departements* of the *Drôme* and of *Isère*.

Seven narrow roads only form a tracery of navigable highways out in the rock, and tunnelled through it.

A sequence of gorges, their walls lofty and abrupt, their depths noisy with rapids and waterfalls, split the Massif in two. They are distinct, autonomous areas, militarily speaking : the North Zone and the South Zone.

The defence of this natural citadel rested largely on bluff. The interior was left undefended. The *Maquis* were able to place a man armed with a rifle or a machine-gun every half mile along the boundary, each man separated from his neighbour by airy ravines, torrents, woods and other natural obstacles.

That day there were two hundred men to defend the Massif. The local *Resistance* headquarters proclaimed the Germans would be repulsed, if they numbered less than twenty thousand.

Avro picked up his rucksack and his gun. For three hours, he walked. He went down into the valley, waded through the torrent near the saw-mill, from which the flag of Captain Cain's company flew its hammer and sickle, and got on to the Gambier road.

With the heat that rose from the ground came the unceasing whine of the cicadas. There was a storm brewing.

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It was five o'clock when he came to Vampire Bridge, exhausted. The lorry was there already. He clambered into it, and found a place by Yanik.

The lorry started almost immediately, and they drove off, heading for Lauzeran. The storm broke. In a few seconds all the *maquisards* were drenched.

Avro huddled close to Yanik.

He said, "It's getting me again. It gets all my body. If I feel I'm going mad again I'll tell you. Hit me on the neck and drag me out of the way, behind a tree. I'll try and find you later. If I don't, I'll do what you say."

The day before, Yanik had told him to desert.

"To get yourself cured of that disease," he had said. "What's the use of sacrificing yourself. We're being sold out anyway. In the regular army with that disease you'd be discharged."

"I know."

"Well then."

"I suppose it's the word that needs getting used to."

"Words," Yanik had answered, "When they tell us to die they use words."

At each clap of thunder, the rain's violence seemed to redouble. The overheated earth still steamed in places under the fall of water, but now its heat was dying and the stench of rotting vegetation came from the ditches.

The men held under their jackets the barrels of whatever weapons they carried, in the hope of keeping out the damp. The old mud on their boots had melted and made the floor of the truck slippery. Their feet slid about, lacking purchase. They had to grip hard on their seats, to stay in place.

The lorry stopped.

Fremont, his pack shouldered, watched them getting ready. He said, "We can't go back to the Fragouse barracks. The Germans have found it. We're going on to Deceiver's Neck, along the crestline. We'll fight where we can. Barrels to the ground. Single file."

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But only a few of them heard his husky voice. The rain slid down his face. The skin was leathery and wooden. His expression did not change. The rain did not seem to disturb him.

As usual, Fremont led, scaling the slopes as if his hobnailed boots were goat-hooves. Over the Massif, the deluge had sodden the earth. It glimmered dully like brown grease. Strung out behind Fremont the section clambered on, stumbling, skidding, falling. Their leather jackets, sodden too, stuck to their skins like icy husks. Their hands, slimy with mud from the incessant falls, kept hold of nothing. They stuck out their gritty tongues, trying to catch the rain.

Avro said, "I'm still all right. Keep going, Yanik. Walk or drop."

They were climbing to the sound of toppling stones, of gurgling and suction. After several hours, they reached the crestline.

Here the wind blew sharper than below. In spite of a heavy sweat they were shivering with cold, and the sweat and the rain froze and stiffened their limbs.

By then, the night was black.

At a small wood, Fremont stopped.

"Leave your packs here. Fill your cartridge belts, take your weapons and two grenades. Any man wants to change his shirt change his shirt," he added sardonically.

"O. K. That'll do. On your way!"

"What about eating," Simeon asked.

"What's the matter, had lunch, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"How many cans have you?"

"Three."

"You'd better save them. Eat the cans. Save the meat. Might be a couple of months, to the next meal."

"What happened to the parachuted stuff?" someone asked.

"Order," Fremont said. "No one knows."

"Someone must," Yanik said. "No food. No clothing. No shoes. Hardly any ammunition. We've been cheated again."

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Fremont's little breathless laugh was audible, in spite of the rain.

"On your way!" he ordered.

Grumbling, the march got under way again. And as they dragged themselves along, their eyes kept staring where, far below, down on the plain, the truck lights were glinting opaquely through the sheets of rain and the smoky air, one following the other interminably, as if always the same light.

Fremont repeatedly turned round and shouted at them. The rush of wind and rain drowned his words, for most of them. Those in front could see his face, as he turned. Once he shouted, "They're only the Germans. Don't worry!"

At some uncertain hour an appalling howl burst from the darkness a little way behind them. It wailed an instant, crying for help, and as it began to die away was suddenly cut short by the storm. The men stopped.

"Get on!" Fremont roared violently.

Yanik, bringing up the rear, shoved hard at the man in front of him, who staggered on to the next and, rippling from the impetus, the column shook, swayed and once again got under way, blindly, tripping over creepers, falling into potholes, recovering and moving on, silent and hypnotized by the serpentine trail of lights crawling across the plain.

Avro struggled to his feet. His neck was stiff from Yanik's blow. Lost in darkness, he began lumbering about like a wild beast. At every step, his mud-laden boots slipped, and at almost every step he fell headlong into a sea of mud, his back battered by his rifle, the strap of which held good, and got up again, and plunged on. He was bareheaded, his hair reduced by disease to glutinous little tufts. In spite of the cold and the hard rain, there was more sweat on his face than mud or rain.

It was too narrow a path along the crest for him to follow it far without straying. He wandered, led by a body that had lost its sense of direction and that could not resist a slope. His heels stuck fast in the shifting mud. He began to slide gently downward, as if on a toboggan. He was soon on his

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belly, and his body turned until he was moving head-first down the slope, his face in the mud. He slid down very slowly all the way, until his head bumped into the trunk of a poplar.

When he came to himself he began to moan plaintively. The foliage curved above him, shaken by the gale, and shed yet more water upon the gleaming eel of mud that was his body.

A few yards below, lights from enemy vehicles glittered in the rain. The engine-noise was muffled by the roar of the cataracts.

He attempted to wipe away the little streams of mud draining into his eyes. He could not. The grit smarted his eyelids. He rolled on to his back. He thought of the group, wondering where they were. His thoughts were few. They served him at that moment not as a guide, but rather as an alarm, brutally waking him. And his perception of the lights affected him similarly, as they crept on the road below. His eyes were smarting.

"It's late to desert," he said, to distract himself. The opacity of the night reassured him. He spat in the direction of the enemy column.

"If it weren't for my eyes," he said, "things might not be so bad. I might even enjoy it. And my throat burning. Swamped with water, yet breathing fire!"

He got to his feet again. There was a young poplar nearby. He grasped it, and tried to uproot it. His bemired hands lost their hold. He passed his forearms round its base and by gripping it between his biceps managed to uproot it. He picked himself up from where he had fallen and stared about. This proof of his strength put him in a slightly better humour.

"I'll break all their necks!" he cried vaguely. He remembered a victorious fight in one of the brothels in Grenoble.

He felt his arms and his chest. He had an inspiration, and peeled off his jacket and shirt. The rain stung his torso.

"Good stuff!" he said, rubbing his hands contentedly over his chest. Stiffening with cold, he began to laugh. The laugh stopped suddenly, and left him nerveless. He began to shiver, and then to tremble.

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A flash of lightning revealed sudden and stark the enemy trucks on the road.

He became panic-stricken. Bent double, hands waving forward, he began frantically to hoist himself up the slope, scrabbling at the roots and stones embedded in the ground. Everything came away in his hands, mildew and rotten wood. His feet skated uselessly behind him. He slid slowly backwards, down the rest of the hillside, and found himself a few yards from the road. His hands and his frozen body were bleeding.

"I'm going to die," he said, as his muscles refused to obey him.

"It's those bastards," he said violently, and turned back to the road, shouting, "Bastards! Bastards!"

He raised his fist against the wind. In a flash of lightning, Avro saw his own arms, lurid and slimy.

The sound of his voice kept back his rising vertigo. He rolled on the ground as if, immersed in mud, he might escape the pain. He hit on the idea of rubbing his eyes, and rubbed them till they were so inflamed he felt they would burst. He began to rage, striking the ground.

He stopped struggling and let his lacerated body sink back, and his muscles soften. He began to champ his teeth, at first deliberately, to amuse himself, and then, as the action of his jaws intensified and he lost control of it, incessantly, so that at each impact his head shook and his teeth seemed to loosen, vibrating at his eardrums. Finally he slithered into the ditch.

In front of him, like phantoms, the enemy trucks were swishing past. Abruptly, he stopped trembling. His jaws locked. He grew nearly clear-headed. His thoughts surprised him, and he felt able to express them clearly. Feelings of compassion overtook him, towards his companions who, with Fremont, had probably by now all perished. Floundering in the ditch, water above his thighs, he felt curiously alive, and seemed to master the pain and the cruel absurdity of his life. Pain seemed a negligible particle of what he knew. He felt exalted.

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He moved forward and dragged himself from the ditch. The beams of the headlamps revived the burning in his eyes. He was visible in the diluvian night with his torso gleaming, his trousers liquid, his eyes of mud. Dazzled, he went on. Anger mounted in him. He folded his arms at his chest.

"Desert!" he howled.

He closed his eyes tightly. He was in the middle of the road. Tottering, he raised his arms to keep his balance.

"Bastards!" he shouted, his voice quavering.

He heard the rumbling of an engine. He could not see its headlights, bearing steadily down on him.

MY ABSENT GOD

My absent God does not disown
That timeless joy He lives alone;
He does not seek as once his own.

But should he change and dive from night
As swan or eagle, would the might
Of creature wings give me insight?

Would loving talons rip despair,
And make the ways of violence clear?
Would holy eyes their vision share?

Or if again a bush in flame,
He burned into my brain His name,
Would I accept this Stranger's claim?

—Cecil Hemley

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A COMPLAINT FOR GEORGE DOTY IN THE DEATH HOUSE

Lured by the wall, and drawn
To stare below the roof,
Where pigeons nest aloof
From prowling cats and men,
I count the sash and bar
Secured to granite stone,
And note the daylight gone,
Supper and silence near.

Close to the wall inside,
Immured, empty of love,
A man I have wondered of
Lies patient, vacant-eyed.
A month and a day ago
He stopped his car and found
A girl on the darkening ground,
And killed her in the snow.

Beside his cell, I am told,
Hardy perennial bums
Complain till twilight comes
For hunger and for cold.
They hardly know of a day
That saw their hunger pass.
Bred to the dark, their flesh
Peacefully withers away.

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The man who sits alone,
He is the one for wonder,
Who sways his fingers under
The cleanly shaven chin,
Who sees, in the shaving mirror
Pinned to the barren wall,
The uprooted ghost of all:
The simple, easy terror.

Caught between sky and earth,
Poor stupid animal,
Stripped naked to the wall,
He saw the blundered birth
Of daemons beyond sound.
Sick of the dark, he rose
For love, and now he goes
Back to the broken ground.

Now, as he grips the chain
And holds the wall, to bear
What no man ever bore,
He hears the bums complain,
But I mourn no soul but his,
Not even the bums who die,
Nor the homely girl whose cry
Crumbled his pleading kiss.

—James Wright

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PATI HILL

CATS

I like cats as far as creatures go. I like almost any animal that does not have horns or scales on it for that matter, but I especially like cats. Any sort and denomination: spotted or solid, fat or thin, with and without fleas. I like them and admire them and almost anything they do is a pleasure to me.

The way they can walk around the rim of a bathtub, for instance, without falling in and the way they can get comfortable in any old place. There is nothing better than a cat looking out from behind a pot of geraniums on a windowsill or walking slowly down a country road of a summer evening. There is something at once comforting and disquieting about a cat which makes him attractive.

They are wonderful when they stick their noses cautiously into a hole and then back out again, and when they flatten down their ears the tops of their heads look like giant bumblebees. Also they have marvelous feet. When a cat puts his paw on the head of a half eaten fish it is at once delicate and dainty and fierce and when he retracts his claws again he is most beautifully innocent like firearms in a shop window or a pin-cushion with no pins in it.

A cat has hundreds of games inside his head and anything that casts a shadow or leaps across his path becomes his toy. He does not have to spend any time deciding what he likes or what is good for him and so he is never awkward.

Of course I know a lot of people do not share my sentiments. For one thing they do not think cats are affectionate

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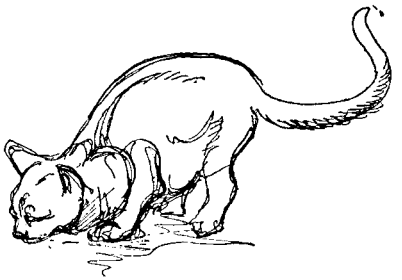

enough because they don't bounce up and down or try to lick your face for you. They remember you though in their own way and purr and rub against your leg which is about all I expect, except from people. Nor is a cat very useful when you come right down to it unless you count catching rats which they do on their own or making hot-water-bottle covers and violin strings which you do out of them when they're done for, or providing sport for small boys. And as far as brains go I'd be the first to admit they haven't got much, at least the human way. If a cat thinks at all it is mostly about problems like how to get off a roof or if a piece of paper is living, but even this has its advantages in the long run. No cat will ever trouble you by bringing your slippers when you're ready to go out or insist on fetching the paper in the pouring rain.

In fact you might say one of the best features of a cat is that it is in every way an *animal.* A baboon for example can never be really lovable because of the way he uses his fingers (but not his napkin) and even a dog is maddening when he understands a little yet misses the point. With a cat there can be no deception. A cat is just a cat from start to end and does not even trouble himself to find out which of you is master.

I have about a dozen cats in my country place outside Paris that live more or less on my side of the road. Most of them I inherited from a nearby farm and they go back and forth as suits their convenience, stopping along the way to

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look for frogs and mice. Our relationship is simple but agreeable. I build the fire and they sit in front of it. I wash the floor and they make tracks. They are good walkers too and like to go for a stroll in the evening. I have one cat who is fond of mushrooms and he is much better at looking for them than a hog. He makes less noise and is just as efficient without being so disgusting. In the morning when I get up there are generally four or five cats at the door waiting for their breakfast and it's fun to see them eating. They ring around the plate side by side with their paws tucked up and their heads together like a kind of furry flower growing close to the ground. A country house is not complete to my way of thinking without a few cats to sit on the gate and lie in the dahlias. It is like a room without cushions or ornaments. Functional but dreary.

I never had but one cat in town. A big grey tom with a square head. At first we got on fairly well together—he thought me a fair substitute for his next of kin without having much idea where I began and ended and later he had an even better opinion of me because I pulled strings with pieces of newspaper attached to them and opened and closed cupboards and ran water in the sink which is interesting to a cat. Then all at once he began to suspect me of going places he didn't go and seeing things he saw only through glass, and worst of all he got the idea he wasn't the only one of himself in existence.

I did not live in the kind of apartment where I could let him out and so when he was feeling grumpy or looking sad I felt obliged to do something about it. To produce some of the excitement he was missing by whatever means I could bring to mind I would run the vacuum cleaner to give him the pleasure of putting his hair on end and scare him by leaping out from the kitchen and banging the pots and pans. Everything I did whether I was repairing the doorknob or peeling potatos I tried to arrange for him to get some satisfaction out of it. Finally I even went so far as to buy a fake mouse and a tinkerball and made a tunnel of boxes that ran from the livingroom straight through the hall, but while he

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admired and appreciated my efforts I could tell that he was still more interested in what was going on in the street than anything else.

It made me very unhappy because it gave me the idea of what it would be like to be a prisoner and so when I had the chance I gave him to some friends who lived in the suburbs, which he didn't like either. By the end of the week he had gnawed a hole through their toolshed and chewed up the curtains and jumped into the washing machine and scratched the baby and about every other thing he could think of to make himself disliked. One of the better qualities of people, though, is that they are kinder than animals and in the end he calmed down and enjoyed himself walking along the back fence and climbing in trees and doing things cats ought to do until he got run over by an automobile.

Street cats, which are the ones I really know best, differ enormously in different countries and those I admire the most are the cats of New York. There is something very rakish and devil-may-care about them. Something sportive and tough and prepared. People are inclined to play tricks on animals in America as well as to be more sentimental than in other countries, perhaps because we like them better at heart, so between the hecklers and the members of protective societies who want to give them a better life a cat has to be on the lookout.

When I think of cats in New York I generally think of them howling terribly or streaking along very close to the ground or up under the lid of a garbage pail with their tails hanging out like the handles of umbrellas. I remember the last long looks of abiding mistrust as they disappear over a wall or the bold look of a cat that knows his own territory. Or the way they will stop to lick themselves hastily and furtively before rushing on through feet and traffic. It is only at night down by the wharves and in secluded places that they come out and walk around slowly and gracefully as if they had a right to a way of their own.

New York cats are night cats. They grow up in dark holes and live in dark alleys. A cat that has managed to get into

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the world and stay there has achieved a certain standing and he shows it. I've never seen a policeman in New York stop to pick up a cat the way I've seen in Paris or kittens being born in front of a department store the way I've seen in Rome. New York cats have to fight for all they get and I respect them for it.

Probably the city that has the greatest cat population in the world is Rome. I guess I should have been prepared for this because almost anybody who has the courage to write about Italy at all writes about the cats—how they go slipping through the night treading the path of the Caesars and sit on columns of broken stone and hunt mice in the Forum. I didn't realize until I went there though that it is the headquarters of the feline.

Everyplace you go in Rome from the smallest passageway to the main street there are cats and more cats. Sitting and walking and waiting and licking themselves and wondering vaguely where the next meal is coming from. You can't go to the cinema or a café or walk in the ruins without seeing cats and if you stop for a minute to look about they will begin coming up to you. Not quickly or eagerly or even as if they had much interest, though actually they do. People in Rome are aware of cats and often feed them like we feed pigeons.

Once in the Coliseum at night I saw over fifty cats in all stages of starvation and friskiness. Some of them were barely more than a head with nothing attached but they're not afraid. All over the ground in places like that you will see little pieces of newspaper that have had food in them and I've often watched people making donations, calmly and peacefully like lighting candles or crossing themselves.

The cats of Rome are without exception very long and lean. Even the ones that live in shops and houses. They have wedgedshaped faces and tall ears and when they sit on their haunches with their heads forward they look Egyptian. This may be because they are more primitive than our cats or maybe they are just built for existence, I don't know. Anyhow there are a mighty lot of them living on a mighty

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little and taking their ease in the sun and it is pleasant to climb up to the entrance of a temple that has been deserted these many years and find a cat on the doorstep waiting. In one place where I went there was a statue on a pedestal that was scarcely more than a belly but it had a cat on its lap and looked rather comfortable.

Paris is the paradise of cats though if you count a full plate of liver as the end in life. Nearly everyone here has a cat and you can't go into a triperie without hearing at least one person laying down the specifications for their nourishment. "Your cat eats lung!" one cat owner exclaims to another. "Eh b'en, le mien ne mange *que* du foie..." and you know who won *that* round.

Concierge cats are about the best off because they have windows that give on the street and if the lady is not of a nervous temperament he can come and go at will. I like to pass down the street where I live and admire the fat backs pressed up against the bars along with the cactuses and cushions and old magazines. The normal color for a concierge cat is a decent grey and black stripe and if he does not weigh at least as much as a small sack of potatos you can be sure something is wrong with him. It is an impressive sight to see a concierge cat get up slowly and lower himself carefully to the ground, and when he goes up the block he walks slowly and steadily slinging his great rope of a tail from side to side. Even opening and closing his jowls or licking his feet is an operation to be taken seriously for these kings among cats.

Café and restaurant life is not bad either. Cats seem to grow bigger and stronger and sleeker on French cooking than on any other and a restaurant cat has his pick in both food and customers. People like cats in France and the bigger they are the more they pay them court.

They are not so many strays as there are in Rome and New York and some of them of them are even better off than if they had homes. There is a white cat that lives on the *quai* in front of my place for instance and although I contribute to his support from time to time he is not always interested in what I bring. He brightens up when I speak to him and if

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he sees I have something in my hand he will come down off the canvas car top where he hangs out but it is mostly curiosity. He gets his main living from a large lady who lives in the rue des Deux Ponts. When she sees me passing the time of day with her charge she gives a stiff little smile. She doesn't like my infringement on what she considers her property and for two francs she wouldn't mind telling me so.

One of the favorite places for stray cats in Paris is the parks. I got to know the cats in the Jardin de Luxembourg fairly well because for a while I went there every afternoon to sketch. At first I used to wonder why there were always so many old pieces of excelsior and straw covers of bottles lying on the ground beneath the hedges of a certain entrance and later I found they were put there by the concierge of one of the houses nearby to protect the cats from the wet. In the winter she comes and shakes the snow off and lays down more pieces of excelsior and more bottle covers and nobody complains because she is a friend of the superintendent.

The cats that live in the park are rather savage and do not come up to you the way they do in Rome. They are more or less taken care of by the women who run the kiosks where toys and candy are sold and people who leave pieces of sandwiches, and by an old lady, very thin and bent up wearing a thin old coat. She would turn up every afternoon about the same hour I did with her black oilskin bag worn to cloth at the handles and first she would sit on a bench backing continuously up to it and lowering herself into place with her stick—*ugh*—as though the two inch drop quite knocked the wind out of her and there she would stay for a moment staring out in front of her before she would arrange her bag on her knees and take out her newspaper parcel.

By the time she got the papers off the contents would seem to have dwindled to almost nothing and she would look and look away again shaking her head, as though something had happened since the time she laid her tid-bits on the paper. "I've been robbed," her expression seemed to say, and she would glance fearfully toward the hedge as though to commence her explanation. By then the furtive shapes of her

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savage pets would have begun to creep along the naked stems and branches toward her, their tails out stiff watching silently with an intent mistrustful gaze as she began talking to them.

"Come little ones, come my pretties, viens Minette, viens viens viens, see what I've brought you..."

If she overestimated the contents of her offering it was in her eagerness to please I guess because no one looking at those cats could have hoped to mislead them by so much as the left fin of yesterday's herring. They had long ago appraised her down to the last fishbone and soggy crumb of bread.

All the same she would tease them for a while before getting up to approach the hedge, promising this and that, as though in an age of plenty she were coaxing a fretful child at the table. Then just before she laid her little offering on the ground she would look it over once more and extract a few morsels for the lame one. Down the hedge a way she would give him his, the cat darting forward to her hand, seizing the remnant of food and darting back again, eager but afraid, and if by any chance one of the vigorous ones should already have finished and trailed her and snapped the piece from her fingers there was such distress in her face, such a hopeless dejection before the bobbing and darting and asking that I could not bear to look.

At moments like this I would have given anything to have handed her a beefsteak or even myself perhaps cut into pieces and wrapped in a *Figaro*. Time after time I would make up my mind to bring something or save my sandwich in case she needed it like a handy life preserver in the middle of the ocean, but I knew it wouldn't do any good. She was just despaired and despairing and this was her way of showing it. Probably it wouldn't have pleased her to be relieved of her last responsibility either, no matter how hard it seemed.

Cats are different. They have different aims in life and different joys and sorrows. They like to be warm and clean and have people take care of them, but I do not feel too sorry for them because they do not feel sorry for themselves.

A cat lying on a stone is not thinking of another cat lying

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on a radiator and a cat licking himself in a patch of sun on a winter's day is inclined to feel cheerful about it. If he finds an old piece of fat fallen into a crack in the pavement he thinks it is all to the good and it tastes better to him than liver twice a day. A cat does not look forward or backward or worry about his sins the way we do. I would not like to be a cat I don't suppose because I'm used to my miseries and I would feel lost without them, but to a cat the best of our lives would probably be an utter tragedy.

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THE WATER OUZEL

The scree in the crevasse
thaws an impasse
for all but what descends
crumbling toward other ends
through deep long valleys where the hidden lake
receives the icy rocks. And for whose sake?
For some
all this is reason for their having come.

I sought the waterfalls
for ouzel calls,
to spy that bird pursue
its rivered avenue
and spin through falling spray to the upper cliff,
singing its way to the source. You ask, what if
I found
everything as I wished upon that ground?

I did, you know. That bird
was briefly heard.
True to its native flight
it follows day and night
from source to mouth and mouth to source and back,
dividing streams with its low whistling track.
Why thus?
Apparently a parable for us.

But need we venture more
upon that score
except that depth and height
exist? And day and night?
Old mountain climbers in sweet rage foretell
ascension days on end. And then rappel
down, down.
And then haul up again from the huddled town.

—Joseph Langland.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Fiction

WARD BOWERS *(The Admiral's Hat)* is thirty years old and lives in Illinois. He has recently started a career in writing after some years in the insurance field. *The Admiral's Hat* is his first published story.

GILBERT FARLANE *(The Deserter)* is the author of *Si haut qu'il tomba*, a novel published by Les Editions de la Table Ronde, and from which *The Deserter* has been adapted. The story is Mr. Farlane's first appearance in English.

JAMES LEO HERLIHY *(A Summer for the Dead)* was born in 1927 in Detroit. His story, *The Sleep of Baby Filbertson*, was published in the fourth number of THE PARIS REVIEW. A play, *The Sleepwalkers' Children*, written with William Noble, will open on Broadway this fall.

Interview

CARVEL COLLINS is Professor of English at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and author of a number of books and articles on American literature and modern fiction. He is teaching this summer at the Salzburg Seminar.

Commentaries

PATI HILL *(Cats)* has appeared a number of times in this magazine. Her journal, *The Pit and the Century Plant*, large sections of which appeared in the seventh number of THE PARIS REVIEW, is to be published by Harper & Bros, this fall in America, and in England by Gollancz.

KENNETH TYNAN *(The Death of Manolete)* is the theater critic for the London *Observer*. He is the author of *He That Plays The King*. *The Death of Manolete* is the last chapter of his next book *Bull-Fever*, just published in England by Longmans, Green and Company, and to be brought out in America next fall by Harper & Bros. The account of the matador's death is factually derived from Francsico Narbona's *Manolete* and Don Luis's *Toros y Toreros*.

Poetry

THOM GUNN *(Two poems)*, a graduate of Cambridge University, holds a creative writing fellowship at Stanford University. Poems of his appeared in the third number of THE PARIS REVIEW. A book entitled *Fighting Terms* was published by the Fantasy Press in 1954.

CECIL HEMLEY *(My Absent God)* is the editor of The Noonday Press and the author of *Porphyry's Journey*, a volume of verse.

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JOSEPH LANGLAND *(The Water Ouzel)* is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. He has contributed to this magazine, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Accent*, and other publications.

ROBERT PACK *(The Parting Fire)* is the poetry editor of *discovery*. His first book of poems, *The Irony of Joy*, is to be published by Scribners in September.

ADRIENNE CECILE RICH *(Two poems)* is the author of a book of poems entitled *A Change of World*. A second collection, *The Diamond Cutters*, will be published by Harper & Bros. in September.

LOUIS SIMPSON *(Windows)* is an associate editor of the Bobbs Merrill publishing company and an instructor in English at Columbia.

WILFRED WATSON *(A Contempt for Dylan Thomas)* was born in England, is at present teaching at the University of Alberta. *Friday's Child*, a book of his poems, will be published in England this fall by Faber and Faber.

JAMES WRIGHT *(A Complaint for George Doty)* attended Kenyon College and the University of Vienna. His poems have appeared in *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and *Poetry*. He is 27 years old.

Illustrations

ROBERT JEFFERSON *(The Death of Manolete)* is a young American artist living in Paris.

TOM KEOGH *(A Summer for the Dead)* had a portfolio of drawings in the first number of THE PARIS REVIEW. He has done work for Hollywood productions, the ballet and the fashion world.

WILLIAM MARSHALL *(Sketch of Georges Simenon)* is an Australian artist living in Paris. He draws a daily cartoon strip entitled *Le Crime ne paie pas* which appears in *France-Soir* and other papers in Europe and the Near-East.

B. WHISTLER DABNEY *(cover drawing, Cats)* is a twenty-two year old artist living in Paris. She has done a number of illustrations for French magazines, including *Realités*. Many of her illustrations have appeared in former numbers of this magazine.

NOTE : The editors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Secrétaire Général of Les Peintres Témoins de Leur Temps in obtaining the portfolio of self-portraits published in this issue.

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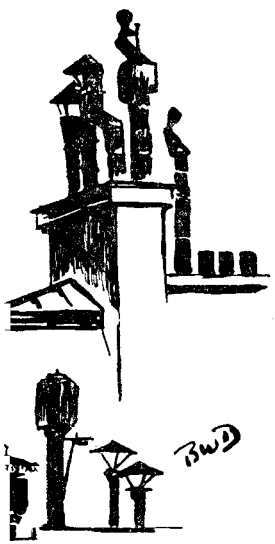

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